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AUTHOR OF

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wife's attention. She took it, and proceeded to fill it, and then the Colonel made answer, quietly, "Not much, Maggie."

"It doesn't seem to surprise you!" said his wife, bestowing on him a glance of suspicion along with his refilled cup.

"Scarcely!" he answered, as he stirred his tea and tasted it with his spoon. "You see, I knew it before."

"You knew it before?" his lady exclaimed, with the astonishment and pain of having been subjected to an outrage on marital confidence.

"Another piece of sugar, please, Maggie," said the Colonel, holding his cup out to her; "you know I always take two lumps. Yes," he continued, in response to the thoughtful amazement with which she fulfilled his request, "I read it three or four days ago in *The Times*."

"And you never told us!" she moaned. She swept her eyes (which were still fine) with full reproach on her husband, and with a dumb, pathetic request for sympathy from her two daughters.

"Oh, papa!" cried the younger, "how could you not have told us?" She was an arch

girl of sixteen or seventeen, with a plait of hair down her back; and she seemed more alive to the humour of the situation than any other at table.

Her elder sister, who was nineteen, said nothing; but she regarded her father with a singularly steady and serious scrutiny.

The Colonel waited an instant to recover from this artillery attack of words and looks. Then, sweeping the table with a glance over his glasses, he quietly made answer: "I believe you all can read, and *The Times* comes every day. It's open to everyone; but no! there are the week's copies up to yesterday;" and he carelessly swept his brown open hand toward a side-table. "Has anyone but me looked at them? No; you have no time to spare from your rubbishy novels." And he pointed a contemptuous finger at a pile of volumes on the top of an old oak secretary.

That counter-attack seemed to silence the female artillery completely. But his younger daughter rose without a word, and solemnly marched to the side-table, while her father assumed a faint look of disquiet. With delibera-

tion she took up one folded copy after another and looked at the date, her mother and sister regarding her the while with curiosity.

"*Wednesday*," she murmured to herself, as if to make certain of the day; "*Monday*." Then she went back, and with more deliberation repeated the business. "*Tuesday* isn't here, father." She suddenly turned, and looked at the Colonel with mischief in her eye.

"Isn't it, my dear?" he slipped into saying, though his manner betrayed that he knew all about Tuesday's absence, for the Colonel was not a man of practised deceit and subterfuges.

"Ivy! Ivy! Shall I say it, father? Shall I say it?" she cried, swinging round her long plait of red hair and admiring the blue bow at its end.

"Say what, you monkey?" demanded her father; but his eye declined to meet hers.

"Say what you've done."

"What have I done?" he demanded, and drank the last drops of his tea.

"Shall I say it? Shall I? You won't be cross?"

"Cross! No! Why should I be cross?"

"Well—you've hid *Tuesday*!"

"Hid *Tuesday*?" he demanded; but his tone and air were not charged enough with innocence to deceive anyone. "Why should I hide *Tuesday*?"

"You know why, you naughty daddy!" cried his daughter, and beat his grey head with her blue bow. "Because you wished us," she answered, marking every word with a pat of the blue bow on his head, "not to know anything of the news about Prince Hermann! That's why!"

"Oh, that's why—is it?" he murmured. He was completely without defence; and he glanced in doubt at his elder daughter, who still regarded him with her steady and serious scrutiny, while fading reproach lingered in his partner's eye.

"Yes," continued the sprightly younger daughter. "But you're a clumsy old dear. I saw you take the paper away, and I wondered why you took it, and so I've devoured every paper that has come into the house since; and then—and then, yesterday, I bought the Week-

ly Free Press at the station. I saw the news and posted it to mamma."

Then father, mother, sister—all three—turned astonished eyes upon the self-revealed delinquent.

"*You* sent it?" exclaimed father and mother together; but in the tone of the one was anger, and in that of the other disappointment.

"Don't be cross, dear!" said the girl, still playfully patting the paternal head.

"Look here, you monkey," said the father, putting her away, "if you and Meg have finished your breakfast you can go; I want to have a word or two with your mother."

The girl slowly departed, perusing her blue bow, and murmuring, "Nasty, cross thing!" At the door she lingered and looked back. "You might at least say it was very clever of me!"

"It was," said her father, with more emphasis than the occasion seemed to demand. "*Doo-sid* clever!" A compliment which provoked the girl to blow him a kiss.

Her elder sister was following her out; at the door she also turned.

"Are you intending to go fishing to-day, father?" she asked, in a clear, passionless voice.

"I—I think so, Meg," answered the Colonel; "you can get ready if you like." There was a singular touch of deprecation in the tone as from father to daughter.

"It was in Tuesday's paper you saw it, then?" said the Colonel's wife, as soon as the girls were gone: she had clearly been turning the fact over as a grievance. "So he is probably there by now?"

"Probably!" said the Colonel. Then, as if he had made an end of dates and probabilities, he added, "That girl" (meaning his second daughter) "will have to be put under discipline."

"How could you, John," wailed his wife, sticking to her own theme—"how could you keep it to yourself?"

"Don't let us have any pretences between us, Maggie," said he, with that blend of severity and indulgence in tone and look which would have betrayed to the skilled observer that he had a great tenderness for his wife, albeit he might despise some of her opinions. "You

know quite well why I kept it to myself. I hoped you might never discover that the Prince was here."

"And what harm, John," she moaned, in a soft, soothing voice, "would there be in knowing the Prince was here?"


"This harm, my dear," answered her husband, promptly, "that you would find means to let the Prince know we were here too."

"Oh, John," she moaned, in reproach, "how can you?"

"My dear," said he, "I have lived with you for twenty years, and I know you."

"And suppose," she fluted softly on, "the Prince did discover we were here; are we so overdone with society that we should find him a bore?"

"On the contrary," said the Colonel, the military staccato sounding more and more in his tone. "I am fond of Prince Hermann. He is an amiable and a clever young man, but I do not wish the trouble we had in Boeotia repeated here. I do not wish to see an amiable and handsome young man of such high rank philandering with my family."



"I am sure," said his wife, "the trouble, as you call it, in Boeotia was all of your own making—excuse my saying so—for I consider that Prince Hermann was most seriously *épris* with Meg."

"Fiddle-de-dee, my dear!" he exclaimed, with shocking asperity; "fiddle-de-dee!" Then, wagging his head an instant and drumming on the table (actions which his wife understood quite well to express the hopelessness of getting her to take his view of the situation), he said, "Let me light up, my dear; if I smoke I may keep my temper." She genially bowed her permission, and he drew a cheroot from his pocket and "lit up." When the tobacco was well alight and exhaled a pleasant fragrance, he continued more philosophically, "Maggie, my dear, you are an incorrigible, an incurable sentimentalist. For twenty years I've tried to cure you; but——" he shook his head, and smoked.

"Cure me?" she laughed, softly. "What is it about, 'Physician——?' You know what I mean. Really, John, if I had half as much sentiment as you——"

"Pardon me, Maggie," said he, growing argumentative as well as philosophical, "there is all the world of difference between *sentiment* and *sentimentalism*. Sentiment is—er—true—er—proper kind feeling about people and things; sentimentalism isn't! A sentimentalist I take to be"—Mrs. Herries-Hay had heard the definition before, but she had the flattering grace to listen as if she hadn't—"a person who will not look facts in the face—in the face!—but will wrap them up and hide them from themselves with all kinds of weak and showy and foolish pretences. That's a sentimentalist! In spite of facts, my dear, you thought—and still think, I see—that a prince smitten with a girl may run the usual course of any young man who is smitten with a girl: hang about with her till he is completely entangled, and then go to papa and propose for her hand. Fiddle-de-dee, my dear—I repeat—fiddle-de-dee!"

"But facts, John, facts?" said his wife, with a smooth, vain show of reasonable argument on her own part. "Is it not a fact that kings and princes *have* married commoners?—stepped down even from their lofty rank and abandoned

it for the love of some lady they adored? Is that not a fact?"

"It's a fact that has occurred so very seldom," said the Colonel, "that it is not worth taking into account."

"But Meg is a very handsome—I may even say, a very beautiful—girl!"

"My dear, I give you up!" said the Colonel. He spread his hands out in helpless surrender, for it was, in truth, himself he gave up. He rose and rang the bell, adding, "My only hope is that Meg is too serious-minded and too clear-seeing to be led away by any stuff of romance or sentimentalism." A servant-maid answered the ring of the bell. "Cut some sandwiches," said the Colonel, "for Miss Meg and me; we're going fishing and shall not be back till evening."

CHAPTER II

THE MATERNAL STRATEGIST

MRS. HERRIES-HAY, when left alone, rose and went to the window. She looked out upon the rude and inspiriting prospect, and her eyes moved as if they took in every feature; but they didn't. She sat down in the easy-chair, and with her gaze levelled over her swelling bosom, she seemed to read diligently in the Weekly Free Press; but she didn't. She was "thinking," as she would have said; that is to say, her fancies were playing in kaleidoscopic fashion round one point of fact which she had derived from the Free Press—"His Royal Highness Prince Hermann at Ardnashiel Castle!" And the bees hummed in, but speedily hummed out again in quest of the sweet-scented heather; and an elegant thievish wasp buzzed in, and made straight for the sugar-basin, and impudently stole the sugar before Mrs. Herries-Hay's eyes. At an-

other time she would have spitefully arisen (for she had no sentimentalism about wasps) and neatly, but remorselessly, have slain that wasp with the point of a knife and flung his carcass out with the sugar-tongs; but not to-day.

She knew when her husband and Meg had set off to their salmon-fishing by the breezy entry of her other daughter.

"Are you going for your drive this morning, mamma?" asked the girl.

"My dear Mamie," exclaimed her mother, in a gush of affection, "come here and let me kiss you!"

Mamie went. She was not too big to be seated in her handsome mother's ample lap, or to be pressed close to her lips and bosom; and she was not so old as to be indifferent to the embrace.

"Dear mums!" she murmured, "you're not cross with me, then?"

The only answer was another hug. Then, as an apparent irrelevance, came: "But you shouldn't, my love, behave to your father with so much familiarity. When I was a girl——"

"Yes, I know, mother," interrupted her sprightly daughter. "But tell me what you're going to do about the Prince: please, mums—as a secret."

"I think we must wait upon Providence, my love," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, taking note whether her daughter's plait was in order.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the girl, and insisted upon sitting up. "Providence doesn't seem much good! Has father given you a wiggling, mums?"

"Hush, love!" said her mother; "you mustn't talk like that. . . . Have they gone?" she asked, after a breathing space.

"Yes," answered Mamie, rising from her mother's lap with alacrity, for she knew her mother well enough to guess that the question was a signal for action; "and John Macaulay's in the kitchen waiting for your orders about the pony."

"Ask John to come here," said her mother.

Mamie skipped out of the parlour, and returned in a second or two preceded John Macaulay, and announcing him with, "Here's John, mother."

"Oh, there you are, John," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, in her softest and most condescending tone of greeting

"Ay, mem," answered John. He was a tall, lean man, with a grizzled head, the solemn aspect of a Presbyterian Kirk elder, but the wild grey eye of a Highlander who sees visions: he was the "minister's man," and he had charge of the minister's pony and trap. Mamie stood by the window with her plait in her hand to follow attentively her mother's interview with John, for she had a premonition that something of interest would come of it.

"What kind of day do you think it will be, John?" asked Mrs. Herries-Hay, as if in vague innocence.

"It will be very fine the day, mem," answered John.

"And this is Saturday?"

"The day will be Setterday, mem."

"So the pony will be able to rest to-morrow, John, won't he?"

"The sheltie, mem, will be aye resting on the Sabbath-day to keep it holy."

"Well, the pony—I mean the sheltie, John,"

she put in, with a smile of concession—"I'm always forgetting the proper word."

"As I'm aye telling ye, mem, a *sheltie* will not be the same size o' beast as a *ponny*."

"Well, John, I'm very sorry. The *sheltie*, then, will be able to go a longer round to-day?"

"What will ye be meaning, mem?"

"Well, John," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, with a slight flush, for she did not like to be cornered, "I was wondering if it would be too far to drive round by Ardnashiel Castle?"

"Do ye mean, mem, far wast or far south?"

"I mean, John," said she, with smooth, sweet patience, like the flow of treacle, "is it a long way?"

"Ardnashiel will be ower the watter, mem," answered John, cocking his eye as if he saw it in vision, "and we must go round by the brig; and it will be a gey stey brae up by Ardnashiel Castle, mem."

"I suppose you mean 'very steep,' John?" said the lady, still sweet and smooth.

"Ay, mem, just that."

"Well," she continued, "the pony—I beg your pardon, John, the *sheltie*—is not usually so

hard-worked but that he can go up a steep road sometimes? ”

“ No, mem. He will be a very willing beast.” The hint of laziness in his sheltie John plainly took as something of a personal affront. “ There will not be a better-willy beast for a hunder miles round Conacher.”

“ Well, John, do you think we might try it? ” she asked, with sweet subjection to his opinion.

“ Hoot, ay, mem!” answered John, in a tone of reckless concession. “ But ye’ll not get back to your lunches, mem; ye’d better take a piece wi’ ye.”

“ We’ll trust to Providence, John. I dare say we’ll be able to get a morsel of something near Ardnashiel? ”

“ Hoots, mem, ay! I’ll get ye a drink o’ milk, I’se warrant.”

Mamie had listened to the interview with interest and something like admiration of her mother’s circling and hovering toward her object. But she wondered, all the same, why her mother had taken so much trouble not to be direct. Why had she not said at once, “ We should like to go by Ardnashiel: is it too far? ”

She did not yet understand that her mother, being what she was, could not approach a desired end in any manner but the circuitous.

So John Macaulay drove them in the minister's old phaeton down the "watter" of Conacher to the bridge, over the bridge, and then up the long brae to Ardnashiel. Mrs. Herries-Hay sat beside John, and talked softly to him in the many stretches of road over which John deemed it necessary that the sheltie must walk, and she asked many soft and ingenious questions, but never a question about the occupants of Ardnashiel Castle; at which, again, her daughter needlessly wondered. As they neared the castle, the fresh mountain air, charged with the resiny odour of the Scottish firs, took hold even on the preoccupied Mrs. Herries-Hay, and made her exclaim how delightful it was.

"It will be grand air, mem," said John. "It's a hungry air, mem; and here will be the lodge. Robbie Farquhar has a coo, and I daursay the wife 'll ha'e a sup o' the morning's milk standing."

So saying, he drew up. They descended from the phaeton. Robbie Farquhar's wife came

to the door, and, recognising John Macaulay, begged the ladies, with Highland politeness, to "step ben" and rest them "a whiley." So they entered the lodge, and stepped "ben the house," that is, into the little parlour; whereupon the polite Highland wife withdrew into the kitchen for the nonce to find for them some oat-cake and milk, and for John a bucket to "water" his sheltie. The polite Highland wife saw very few people, and therefore she was exceedingly curious regarding those she did see—a fact which Mrs. Herries-Hay had subtly counted on. So it was with a face relaxed with an indulgent smile that she overheard, from her seat by the open parlour door, John Macaulay being questioned by the good-wife. Who were the "led-dies"? 'Od, John answered, did she not know they were the wife and daughter of the "grand Kornel man" who had come to fish the "water"? Oh, said the good-wife, and where did they "bide"? Where other should they bide, said John, but in the manse that the "Kornel" rented from the minister while he was away on his "jaunt to the South"! And what was their name? Ah, they had two "grand" names of

their own, for the "Kornel" was a "grand man," and the names were "weel-kenned" Scottish names—and what should they be but *Herries-Hay!*

When the good-wife came "ben," bearing a tray with milk and butter, a plate of oat-cakes, and a kebbock of cheese, she was questioned in her turn by Mrs. Herries-Hay.

"I see your gravel is well-trodden, Mrs. Farquhar," said the lady, in her softest tone and with her sweetest smile. "Are you very busy at the castle?"

"Oh," answered the good-wife, "terrible busy, mem, since the coming o' the Prince."

"What prince is that, Mrs. Farquhar?" asked Mrs. Herries-Hay, in open-eyed interest and innocence.

"You will not have heard, mem," said the woman; "he has an unco name," and she uttered a laugh politely restrained, as if the mere thought of the name amused her—"but he is a kind o' far-away cousin to the Queen. And he is a very pleasand gentleman, whatever; and he speaks very good language."

"What did you say his name was?" asked

Mrs. Herries-Hay, with the innocence of a child.

"It's Hermann, mem," said the woman, and blushed for its oddity.

"Prince Hermann of Boeotia?" cried the lady, as if in a soft suffusion of surprise and glee.

"That's the name, mem," said the woman. "I've got hold o't so ill with my tongue that I'm shy about saying it. But ye've got the way o't, mem," she added, with flattering approval. "And ye'll maybe be kenning the Prince, mem?"

"We knew the Prince," answered Mrs. Herries-Hay, with a soft carelessness of manner, stroking the head of a lint-haired child that came and stood at her knee and gazed up into her face, "in his own country."

"And did ye, indeed, mem?" exclaimed the good-wife, palpably impressed. Then to the child she said, "Dinna fash the leddy, Robbie," and made to remove him.

But Mrs. Herries-Hay knew what to say to win the mother. "Oh," said she, "he's not fashing me." And in a second she had the child

in her lap. "You're a bonny boy," she added; "and is your name Robbie, like Robbie Burns?" And still the child gazed at her, unabashed, but silent.

"'Deed, mem," exclaimed the fond and smiling mother, "it's just after his feyther he's called: he's Robbie too. . . . The Prince and his gentlemen," she added, reflectively, "have been out-by since skreigh o' day: they're up the glen after the deer;" as if, had he been in the castle, it would have been a natural thing for Mrs. Herries-Hay to have called on him.

The conversation was becoming slack; and Mamie, who was convinced her mother had not yet gained her purpose (whatever it might be), listened and waited with the keenest interest. Mrs. Herries-Hay stroked the child's head and smiled indulgently on him.

"And what," she softly murmured, "is Robbie going to be when he grows up? The same as his father, I suppose?"

"I hope, mem," said the proud mother, "he'll be something better than his feyther; ye see, mem, he's our only ane, and he kens his A B C and 'Gentle Jesus' already. But he's

terrible thrang wi' the horses," she added, with a touch of doubt.

"And that's what his father does, I suppose," said Mrs. Herries-Hay; "looks after the horses?"

"My man is head coachman to the Earl, mem," said the woman.

"Head coachman, is he?" said Mrs. Herries-Hay; and Mamie knew by the light in her mother's eye that she had at length found what she wanted. "But in the country here he'll have little to do, won't he?"

"Excepting on the Sabbath, mem. Sabbath's a hard day when the family's at hame; because the castle, ye understand, mem, gangs to the kirk at Crathie on the Queen's account."

"But Crathie's a long way, isn't it?" said Mrs. Herries-Hay.

"It is that, mem."

"Surely the Prince won't go so far as Crathie? Your husband ought to drive him to our kirk," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, with a casual, careless smile. "We call it *ours* because we are staying at the manse, you know."

"So I hear, mem," said the good-wife. Then, as if taken with the idea, "And it would be a hantle easier, whatever, for my man to drive there and back."

"Mamie, dear," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, setting the child down, "I think we had better be going."

She took out her purse and bestowed a bright shilling on the astonished Robbie: she knew better than to offend Highland pride by offering to pay for her own and her daughter's entertainment. And she departed in the sure and certain hope that she had gained her purpose; for she knew how the great have their indifferent movements regulated from below, and she had discovered, moreover, what a talent Highland people have for polite dictation to those whom they serve.

"How clever you are, mother!" whispered Mamie, as they stepped into the waiting phaeton.

"Hush, child!" said Mrs. Herries-Hay. "Not a word of this at home, mind."

"Oh, but mother," said Mamie, "you said you were going to wait on Providence,

and you've just come and waked Providence up."

"My dear," said her mother, in her soft, sweet manner, "if I didn't wake Providence up sometimes, nothing would happen."

CHAPTER III

THE INVASION OF THE KIRK

MRS. HERRIES-HAY was very sweet over the late breakfast of Sabbath morning. She softly purred amiable nothings to her husband, kept him amused with things indifferent, and gently led him away from all ground of suspicion. But, as the hour for the morning service in the kirk approached, her excitement grew to such a pitch that she prematurely withdrew to dress for the sacred function. The kirk bell had begun its summons to all the parish, and its clanking notes were echoed from the heights around, from the deep bed of the Conacher Water, and from the opposite fir-clad slopes of Ardnashiel. The Colonel and his constant companion Meg stood out on the green before the manse, he in drowsy satisfaction with his matutinal cheroot and the Sabbath peace and sunshine, and she with a salmon-gaff in her hands, practising

imaginary strokes in the royal game of golf. Both were figures that the eye delighted to dwell on: he was tall, lean, brown, and soldierly; and she, also, was tall and straight, in the trim morning dress of the modern girl, but with a statuesqueness of proportion which the modern girl rarely attains to. Indeed, her beauty—and she was undeniably beautiful and fair—was of a sort rather to compel admiration than to provoke desire; she was less like an ordinary gay and smiling lady than like the calm ideal woman sculptured on the frieze of the Parthenon; less a girl to be loved than a goddess to be worshipped; less a subject of frivolous flirtation than a predestined mother of stalwart sons.

Suddenly she stopped, stood erect, and looked down the slope like a deer at gaze.

“Father!” she exclaimed: the cry escaped her, as in a sudden gasp of surprise. “Look!” she continued, “who are in that waggonette.”

Her father came and stood beside her. Her eyes were on a bend of the road which wound up the face of this slope, and on a vehicle with a fine pair of bays labouring thereon. The grinding of the wheels could be plainly heard,

and in the intervals between the fir-trees, the nodding of the horses' heads could be seen as they toiled at the collar.

"There are no ladies," said the Colonel, after some seconds' observation, "and four men!"

"Do you see," said Meg, "that big man on the box beside the coachman? He's on this side of the coachman, of course."

"I see him," answered the Colonel; "looks like a soldier."

"And isn't it the Boeotian livery, father?" said Meg, in a half-doubtful, half-fearful tone.

"By George!" he exclaimed, in a low voice, "I believe it's the Prince coming to church!" He looked thoughtfully at his daughter an instant, and she thoughtfully returned his gaze, till some reflection came upon her and brought a suffusive blush; and then she turned her head away. The Colonel glanced over his shoulder towards the manse, and turned him about and went in; and Meg followed.

Mrs. Herries-Hay was sitting dressed for church when her husband and Meg entered the parlour, and Mamie was at the side window which looked towards the kirk and the kirkyard.

"There's a rather swell waggonette coming up the road," said the Colonel, "and I think it is bringing Prince Hermann to church from Ardnashiel."

"You don't mean to say so, John?" exclaimed his wife. She was drawing on her gloves, and she let her hands drop loosely in her lap, and sat gazing in astonishment at the news—it was very effectively done.

"I think there can be no doubt of it," said he, completely imposed on by her air of ignorance and amazement; "but we shall see in a moment." And he went and looked over Mamie's head towards the kirk.

"How did you manage it, mother?" whispered Meg, bending over Mrs. Herries-Hay with a shrewd smile.

"You're a fool!" whispered back her mother, taken at unawares, and rising in anger. She rose at the cry of Mamie, "Here they are!" She was just in time to see the fine bays draw up at the kirk gate, and the big *chasseur*, or groom, descend from his place beside the coachman to open the door of the vehicle. "It looks certainly like the Boeotian livery," she observed.

"It is the Boeotian livery!" said the Colonel in growing excitement. "And there's Prince Hermann walking in at the gate: there's no doubt of it! And, by George! there's the old Cancellarius von Straubensee!—sent by the king, I suppose, to keep his son in order!"

"Where will they sit?" exclaimed Mamie, seizing her father's arm in her excitement: she had suddenly remembered that the place of honour—the minister's pew—had been hitherto occupied by themselves, as tenants of the manse.

"We," said the Colonel, with manifest resolution, "will sit in the first vacant pew by the door."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Mamie. "Why?"

"Because," said the Colonel, with a spice of temper in his tone, "I am not going to thrust myself and my family upon the notice of the Prince and his suite from Boeotia!"

Mamie could not prevent her glance from seeking her mother; and her mother, though she said no word, could not help but look somewhat disappointed. But the bell was clanking its last deliberate note or two before ceasing its summons, and they bestirred themselves to go

out to the kirk and take their places. There was a short cut through the garden of the manse, and the kirk-yard; and in a few seconds they were within the kirk-door. John Macaulay whispered "that the foreign gentry frae Ardnashiel" were in the minister's pew, but all the same he was for marching them down to a front place.

"This will do, John," said the Colonel, and urged his family into the backmost pew of all.

"But, man, Kornel," whispered the scandalised John, "that will be a poorhouse seat!"

The Colonel took no more notice than to bow him off. He glanced sharply down the kirk, before opening his Bible and reading (according to his wont while waiting for the service) the dedication To the Most High and Mighty Prince James. It was evident that the usually hushed, motionless, and solemn congregation of humble worshippers was somewhat perturbed and scandalised, and it was plain that the reason of its unusual flutter and emotion was the presence and behaviour of the distinguished strangers in the minister's pew. Not that the strangers behaved ill in an ordinary

sense; but the minister's pew was set at right angles to the multitude of the pews, tempting its occupants to let their eyes rove. And the strangers took full advantage of their opportunity. Instead of waiting for the incoming of the minister in awed silence, with bent heads and abstracted gaze (like Mahatmas in a dream), they loudly whispered to each other, and looked boldly about them on the bare little kirk and its silent congregation—"as if," murmured John Macaulay afterward, "they were in a play-house!" The Colonel having noted these things, abstracted his attention, and read To the Most High and Mighty Prince James until the gowned minister was ushered into the pulpit by John Macaulay. The minister was a dull "supply" from College, and (after the first few minutes of curiosity) had no hold on the attention of the strangers. Colonel Herries-Hay, though he studiously kept his eyes away from the minister's pew, was subtly aware that two, at least, of his family did not; and soon he became aware also that he and his family had been noted by the strangers.

Yet, when the service was over, he made

haste to get himself and his family out of the kirk and home to the manse, insisting, indeed, on seeing his wife and daughters pass out of the kirk-door before him—the which was so unusual a proceeding with him that Mrs. Herries-Hay could not but look a little ruffled and rebellious. The Colonel, however, had thus herded his family before him but a few steps across the kirk-yard when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a loud, cheery voice sounded in the ears of all the family and brought them to a stand.

“How-do-you-do, Colonel?”

The Colonel turned and his hand was heartily grasped by a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with great yellow moustachios sticking out four inches on either side. It was Prince Hermann of Boeotia.

“How very jolly it is to see you and your amiable wife and daughters once more!” said he. He spoke with a certain stiffness and awkwardness of accent, though, as the good-wife of the Ardnashiel lodge had said, it was “very good language”—and he included the ladies in a very formal, but very courtly bow; but his bright, vivacious eye was on the statuesque and

stately Meg. "Some of my people," continued the jolly young man—and his voice had the rush and vigour of a breeze—"have said, 'The Herr Colonel Herries-Hay dwells not far away in the pastor-house, and goes on the Sunday to the kirk': your Scottish 'kirk' is like our German word. And—ha! ha!—it is very jolly to see you once more!—very jolly indeed!" Again he smiled upon the family, but his eye dwelt wistfully upon Margaret.

"We are honoured, your Royal Highness," said the Colonel, with a touch of military stiffness, for which his wife reproached him with a comprehensive look that passed over his proud head.

"Ah," said the Prince, circling on his heels with military precision, suddenly bethinking himself, and speaking in German, "Herr Colonel, you remember the Herr Cancellarius von Straubensee?"

"I remember the Herr Cancellarius perfectly," said the Colonel, bowing to the benevolent-seeming Chancellor, who was an old man with a foolish-looking, fluffy-white head and beard—like cotton-wool. He had, besides, a puffy, pink

face, which made him look more foolish; but he had a sharp, restless eye.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the jolly young Prince, adding again in German, "This is the first time that the Herr Cancellarius has visited your romantic country of Scotland, Herr Colonel, and he sits all the day in the library of the castle and reads the romances of your Sir Walter Scott, with the attention of a boy. Ha! ha!"

"I have read your Sir Walter Scott, Herr Colonel," said the old Chancellor, "when I was younger, but he is better to be understood in his own scenes. Yes, I find it so."

"If the Herr Cancellarius," put in Mrs. Herries-Hay, in her softest tone and with her sweetest smile, "is truly interested in Sir Walter Scott, it may please him to know that the Castle of Ardnashiel is the house of the Macaulays described in the beginning of The Legend of Montrose."

"Soh!" exclaimed the Cancellarius, becoming wonderfully animated with the news. "Is that so, madam?"

"It is indeed, Herr Cancellarius," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, looking frankly at him with her

fine eyes, while her husband and daughters regarded her with silent amazement. She continued without the flutter of an eye-lid, "And the pass behind the hill there, down by the lake, is where the Marquis of Montrose met with Ritt-master Dugald Dalgetty, home from the German wars."

"Soh!" again cried the Cancellarius, turning him about in his extreme interest to look in the very direction she pointed. "Is that so, madam?" And then, turning to her again after he had looked, he added, "You know many things of interest, madam, about this country here and your Sir Walter Scott—do you not? Yes?"

"Ah, a great many, Herr Cancellarius," she answered. "The country round about is crowded—packed!—with—with that kind of interest."

"Ah, madam!" exclaimed the Cancellarius, with his hand on his rotund waistcoat, "how agreeable to know these things all!"

"Oh, Cancellarius," said madam, with a smile of infinite kindness, "I am ready to share my poor little store of knowledge."

"Ha! ha!" put in the Prince. "Herr Cancellarius, we must beg the never-to-be-thanked-enough and the exceedingly-amiable Mrs. Herries-Hay to be our cicerone in the country!"

At that the Chancellor blinked and bowed, and said it would give him the extremest delight.

"But," said the Colonel, with a vague, elusive suspicion of the tendency of all that, "you have come to shoot the deer, have you not, your Royal Highness?"

"It is true," said the Prince. "I am here to shoot. But one cannot always shoot." And again he looked with wistful meaning at Meg. "You also are here to shoot, Herr Colonel; is it not so?"

"No, sir," said the Colonel. "I am too old and stiff to stalk the deer: I content myself with fishing."

"And the Fraülein Herries-Hay," said the Prince, at length boldly addressing Meg with tongue as well as with eye, "what does she do?"

"I fish a little with my father, sir," answered Margaret.

"And Mrs. Herries-Hay visits the spots of

interest. Ha! ha! How very jolly!" cried the young man. "But we detain our most amiable friend, Cancellarius. And that, I suppose," said he, pointing to the manse, "is the pastor-house, Herr Colonel?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Colonel, "that is the pastor-house, where we dwell for the present."

The Prince uttered a breezy, cordial adieu, and bowed to his amiable friends; and his suite bowed, and the family bowed; and the few country-folk who still hung about the kirk-yard (the solemn John Macaulay among the number) were much impressed with the familiar terms the "Kornel" and his family seemed to be on with a Royal Prince, who was "a kind of far-away cousin of the Queen."

"How on earth, Maggie," exclaimed the Colonel, as soon as they had turned their feet again toward the manse, "do you know that about the castle and Montrose?"

"Is it not possible, John," said his wife, sweetly and softly, "even for a woman to read other things sometimes besides rubbishy novels?"

The Colonel looked at his wife with a great perturbation of doubt revealed in his honest brown countenance. "Do you think it's true?" he asked, with a touch of hesitation in his tone.

"John!" was all his wife said; but in her soft voice there was a world of gentle reproach for an ungenerous wound.

"I think," whispered Mamie, to her sister (they were walking behind their parents)—"I think mother has just guessed it."

"I believe," whispered Meg, in return, "she has just invented it."

"Why?" whispered Mamie, with intense curiosity.

"Oh—why?" echoed her sister. "Is there any knowing why mamma does and says things until half a year afterwards?"

CHAPTER IV

"WHA'S CATCHIN' FUSH?"

It was by an admirable instinct of feminine and maternal suspicion that Mrs. Herries-Hay had fixed on the Herr Cancellarius von Straubensee as the one enemy of her schemes who was formidable, and who must, therefore, be either conciliated or circumvented. She had no doubt that the old Chancellor had accompanied Prince Hermann from Boeotia to keep an eye (as the Colonel said) on the young man's philanderings, and she thought it more than probable that, though he was much of a recluse at the Court of Boeotia, he must be aware of the anxiety with which the king (as well as the Colonel Herries-Hay) had regarded the marked attentions bestowed by the Prince upon Meg. She knew, moreover, that though Prince Hermann was only second son to the king, there was but the frail and consumptive life of his unmarried elder

brother between him and the Crown Princedom, and that, therefore, any entanglement of his with a woman who could not be recognised as his consort was the more carefully to be guarded against; and she took for granted that the old Chancellor must have had his instructions accordingly.

She would have been rejoiced, then, could she have been present next morning in Ardnashiel castle, and noted the effect of her impression made the day before on the old Chancellor. It happened that, after a long and stiff day on the hills with the deer, Monday as well as Sunday had been decreed as a day of rest. Therefore on Monday His Royal Highness's breakfast was not fixed for an early hour, and the Herr Cancellarius was able to wander in and out the castle first thing, uninterrupted and unquestioned, with the castle copy of the Legend of Montrose in his hand, and a portentous engrossment of interest in his fluffy head. He first wandered out to take a full view of the castle.

" 'One or two high-ridged narrow buildings, intersecting and crossing each other,' " he read, tracing the words with his nail, " 'formed the

corps de logis.' ” He looked up at the buildings, and walked back and forth to see them endways and in perspective, and murmured, “*Das ist soh!*” He then went on to read, “‘A projecting bartizan or two, with the addition of small turrets at the angles, much resembling pepper-boxes. . . .’” He was not very clear about the exact meaning of one or two words, but he caught their effect, and again he murmured, “*Das ist soh!*”

When he had accomplished his perambulation without, he returned within, book in hand and finger in place. There he became more closely occupied; for he could not make the description of “the low-arched stone hall” fit any room or hall he entered. At breakfast with Prince Hermann and the rest of the suite (for the Prince kept no kind of stand-off state) he uttered his difficulty.

The Prince paid no heed to him: he was absent-minded, in an obviously breezy, feather-headed fashion, but cheerful, with the hum of a song in his throat while he ate and drank.

“What was the date of that?” asked the

Count von Saxe of the troubled Chancellor; "I mean of the building you speak of."

"Some few years," answered the Chancellor, "after the death of the Swedish Gustavus in our famous battlefield: 1644 or 1645, as I understand it."

"Oh, then," said von Saxe, looking round him and up at the ceiling, "the interior of the castle may have been rebuilt since then. It is probably so."

"That is so," said the Chancellor.

"You know well all things and music English, Willy?" said the Prince, of a sudden, to his friend von Saxe, whose Christian name was Wilhelm, but who was commonly called by its English abbreviation because of his fondness for English fashions and English speech.

"I am not ignorant of them, sir," answered von Saxe.

"What is the English *lied*, or song, or ballad, that runs in my head," said the Prince: "Tra-la-la-la, la-la-la-la," and he hummed a stave.

"Does your Royal Highness mean," said von Saxe, with a careful smile at the corner of his mouth, "'T'd crowns resign to call her mine,

sweet lass of Richmond Hill? ' ' ' and he sang the words in a good voice.

"That is the thing," said the Prince, "and Richmond Hill is near London, is it not?"

"There is one Richmond there, sir," answered von Saxe, "but another somewhere else."

"Ah, then," broke out the Prince, "I give my voice for the somewhere else. *Ha! ha!*" and he resumed his humming in the throat.

"It is possible, von Saxe," observed the old Chancellor, "that the highly-well-informed wife of the Herr Colonel Herries-Hay will know if the interior has been rebuilt?"

Then the eye of the Prince betrayed that he gave heed.

"It is quite possible, Herr Cancellarius," answered von Saxe, carelessly.

"It is also possible to go and put the question to her, Cancellarius," said the Prince.

"That is so, your Royal Highness," said the Chancellor.

"A famous idea!" exclaimed the Prince, flinging aside his table-napkin. "We have nothing to do to-day to occupy us. Let us all

go down." There was instantly a sharp wariness in the eye of the Chancellor; but it softened and died away as the Prince continued: "You, Cancellarius, can have your agreeable conversation with the ladies, and I and von Saxe will visit the Herr Colonel at his fishing of the salmon."

"That is so, my Prince," said the Chancellor. "That will be agreeable."

So they rose from breakfast; and, while a vehicle was being got ready, the Prince wandered into the library, followed by his friend, von Saxe. He took up a book he had been reading: it was an English translation of the ancient little French romance of Aucassin and Nicoletti. He opened it and read. Presently he turned to his friend with a pleased face.

"Listen, Willy," said he:—"Her hair was golden and in little curls, and her eyes blue-grey and laughing, and her face oval, and her nose high and well-set, and her lips vermeil, so as is no cherry nor rose in summer-time, and her teeth white and small; and her breasts were firm, and heaved her dress, as it had been two walnuts.'" He paused.

"Very pretty, sir," said von Saxe.

"But *walnuts*, Willy? No," said the Prince, "*walnuts* will not do!"

"Say *apples*, then, sir," suggested von Saxe, carelessly flipping a fly on the window.

"Um-m. Yes. *Apples*," said the Prince; and then continued the reading:—" 'And between the sides she was so slender that you could have clasped her in your two hands.' No, Willy; that will not do either."

Von Saxe turned with a thought in his eye. "That, sir, is a French waist."

"True, Willy. You know," said the Prince. He resumed reading:—" 'And the daisy blossoms which she broke off with the toes of her feet, which lay fallen over on the bend of her foot, were right black against her feet and her legs—so very white was the maiden.' " He ceased.

"Very pretty, sir," said von Saxe.

"That is so," said the Prince. "That is she!"

"And who is she?" asked von Saxe.

"Nicolette," answered the Prince, and handed him the book.

"Your Royal Highness," said a servant, at the door, "the carriage waits."

In a few minutes they were being driven in a four-wheeled dog-cart down the odorous, fir-clad slopes to the Conacher Water. They drove up the road, past the church, just after the Colonel and Meg had gone fishing, and just when John Macaulay was shoving his obstinate sheltie into the phaeton. Mamie was out on the green before the manse, swinging her skirts in the sunshine, when she spied the coming vehicle. She darted into the house, and her mother's presence.

"Oh!" she cried, "what do you think, mums? Here are the Prince and his friend, and that funny, fluffy old man!"

Mrs. Herries-Hay showed no sign of fluster or perturbation. She continued the tying of her bonnet-strings, and purred, "They've come sooner than I expected."

"You expected them, then, mother?" exclaimed her daughter.

"My dear child," said her mother, "one doesn't take trouble without looking for something to come of it."

“Mother, you are wonderful! But what trouble did you take yesterday?” said the daughter, standing an instant with hands low-clasped in an attitude of something like adoration.

Her mother made no answer, but the light of victory shone in her fine, soft eye. That light was subdued, however, to a gentle suffusion of mingled surprise and pleasure when she received the Prince and his companions in the parlour. Her behaviour was perfect for the occasion. She made no allusion to the humility of her abode—she said nothing at all about it—nor did she exclaim about the honour done to her; she merely accepted the visit with frank pleasure, but without effusion.

“Dear Mrs. Herries-Hay,” said the Prince, “we take you by storm, because we rest to-day from the deer-hunting. But you forgive us—eh?”

“‘Forgive’ is too strong a word for the occasion, sir,” said the lady. “In the country—and especially in the Highlands—we live without ceremony. We leave ceremony in the town, sir.”

"Ah," said the Prince, "that is good, dear madam. The things ceremonial are——" he turned to von Saxe, saying, "what is the word, Willy?"

"A great nuisance, sir," suggested von Saxe.

"Yes," said the Prince, "that is the word. Now we are friends—good friends—and for that reason I have brought the Herr Cancellarius to you, dear Mrs. Herries-Hay, with the book in his hand, to desire more knowledge from your never-to-be-exhausted store. He desires to know about the interior of the castle, dear madam: that is your question, Herr Cancellarius—*hein?*"

"That is so, madam," said the Cancellarius, with a bow—"and more also."

"I am at your service, Herr Cancellarius," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, "with all I know."

Notwithstanding that the well of knowledge which the Chancellor desired to pump was of the shallowest, the lady maintained her extraordinary self-possession. She turned to her daughter.

"Mamie, dear," said she, "run and tell John Macaulay not to put the pony in."

The Cancellarius was at once aflame with interest. His book—the castle copy of the Legend of Montrose—was out from under his arm and open in his hand. “McOwlay! you did name a man McOwlay, madam! There is here a person—a man!—a chief!—with the name McOwlay!” and he rapidly turned over the leaves of the book. “Ah, that is so! Angoose McOwlay!” He pronounced the words most barbarously to an English ear—making the “u” sound “oo” and the “au” sound “ow” in the German fashion, but Mrs. Herries-Hay did not even yield to the temptation to correct him.

“Oh, yes,” said she merely, “it is the same name. Yes. Your meaning is that the clan or tribe still lives here? Oh, yes,” she continued, “there are many of the name about!”

“That is so!” said the Cancellarius, making a mental note.

The Prince was growing restive. “Now, Cancellarius,” said he, “I hand you over to Mrs. Herries-Hay (if she will permit me—ha! ha!—if she will permit me) to continue your instructive conversation, and I and von

Saxe will look for the Herr Colonel. The Colonel is at his fishing, is he not, madam? Yes?"

"He is, sir," answered the lady. "But how will you find him? Ah, Mamie dear, just take the Prince and Count von Saxe to the pool your father said he was going to try this morning." And the light of triumph again shone in the mother's eye; for she saw the possibility of a new combination.

So while she drew—or pretended to draw—knowledge up from her shallow well for the instruction of the Herr Cancellarius, the flighty but shrewd Mamie gallivanted off with the Prince and his friend.

"Don't you fish, Prince Hermann?" asked the young lady, interrupting the Prince in his humming of a song deep in his throat.

"Fish, my dear young lady?" said the Prince, as if he did not understand.

"Don't you catch fish, I mean?" said the young lady.

"No, my dear young lady, I do not catch fish: they will not permit me."

"Do you mean, Prince," asked Mamie,

"that the fish won't let you, or the—the people round about you?"

"I mean the fish, dear young lady," answered the Prince, "not the people. Ha! ha!"

"Oh, then, you have tried?" asked the young lady.

"I have tried, miss," answered the Prince, smiling in broader and broader amusement.

"Why don't you try again, Prince? What's the good of being a Prince if you let yourself be beaten by a fish?"

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the Prince; and "Ho—ho—ho!" laughed the Count; and Mamie, like a sly young minx, opened wide her eyes and solemnly looked from the one to the other, as if she could not guess what was the cause of their mirth.

"Wouldn't you like to learn to fish?" she asked, simply.

"I would, my dear young lady," he answered, "very much love to learn to fish, if you would be so kind as to teach me."

"Oh, I can't teach you," answered Mamie: "I mean salmon-fishing. Only father and Meg

can do that. I can catch trout with my hands, but——"

"With your bare hands and arms in the water?" exclaimed the Prince. "But how very clever!"

"Yes," said Mamie; "but it's not fishing."

"Ha!" cried the Prince, stopping and facing her. "A famous idea! What if your noble sister should teach me the fishing of the salmon, and you should teach von Saxe the catching of the trout, which is not fishing! Would it not be jolly! I think it would be jolly!—very jolly, indeed!"

"All right!" said Mamie. "But we mustn't tell my mother!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Prince; and "Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the Count.

She certainly was a promising daughter of her mother.

CHAPTER V

A COLONEL INVITES A PRINCE TO LUNCH

THE Colonel was wading deep in a black, sullen pool of the Conacher Water, and his daughter Meg stood on a granite boulder that pushed into the pool at its lower end. They heard voices, and, looking in their direction, they saw two men and a girl coming over the top of the steep bank through the fir-trees: there was no difficulty in recognising them."

"Well," said the Colonel, "here's good-bye, I doubt, to fishing for to-day! Oh, Meg! Meg!"

"Father," said Meg, "you don't think I've done anything—to—to——"

"No," said her father, beginning to reel in his line. "But your mother is a very clever woman!" He said that with an accent as of despair, as if it were of no use seeking to struggle against her cleverness.

"But she can't have brought them here against their will?"

The Colonel wagged his head. "She's a clever woman!" he insisted.

"It seems like a determined fate," said Meg, after a pause.

"If you feel like that, Meg," said her father, looking sharply at her, "we're done for!" She made no answer. "*Do* you feel like that?" he demanded.

"I don't think I feel like anything, father!" she said, after appearing to examine herself.

"Hoy! *hold*, Colonel!" roared the breezy voice of Prince Hermann. "How is the fishing?"

"We have just been whacking this bit of water, sir," answered the Colonel, cheerily.

The Prince was viewing Meg on her rocky perch. She looked Amazonian and warlike in her short tweed skirt and gaiters and Tam o' Shanter cap. He swept off his deer-stalker hat and made a most ceremonious bow.

"Ha!" said he, "it is the Lady of the Lake! It is a splendid pose! My compliments, Miss Herries-Hay! Ha! ha!"

With a quick blush, Meg turned and leaped from the boulder, and began hastily winding in her line. The Prince noted that Colonel Herries-Hay was doing likewise. Could it be that they meant to return to the manse at once? That was not at all what he desired.

"Oh, Colonel, pray!" he cried, with his hands raised in supplication, "do not abandon your fishing! And Miss Herries-Hay, pray do not! I shall be sorry if you do. We come to look at you occupied, for the interest and the pleasure: the Cancellarius was determined to visit Mrs. Herries-Hay to have all her information about the castle; and he brought me and von Saxe with him. He is now with Mrs. Herries-Hay, stealing her information. Ha! ha!"

That account of the untimely visit—that it was merely a concession to the Chancellor's hunger for knowledge—lifted from the Colonel's simple mind its cloud of suspicion, but strangely depressed the mind of Meg. As she had told her father, she was not conscious of "feeling like anything" towards Prince Hermann; but she had had the conviction that it was after her the Prince had come, and naturally she was

piqued and fascinated by the thought of his pursuit. But, if it was not interest in her that had brought him, why then—then she had been mistaken. That was all, and, considering her father's views and what she had imagined her own, she ought to have been relieved and pleased. But she was not. She knew she was depressed; she wondered, but she was a step nearer to understanding herself. Being depressed and wondering, she was silent; and the Prince thought he had offended her by his comparison of her to *The Lady of the Lake*. Quite frankly and humbly he stepped forward to her.

"Pray," said he, "let me hold your fishing-rod till you mount your rock again."

"No, thank you, Prince," said Meg, without a touch of coquetry in her manner. "I am going to try another place, and I am quite used to carrying my rod."

"Ah, not in pickles?" said the Prince, with a humorous humility. "You keep not the rod in pickles?" He tried to catch the line as it swung past him.

"Oh, please, take care!" cried Meg. "The hook may catch in you."

"And what a great fish I would be! Ha! ha!" exclaimed the Prince.

The Colonel, after thoughtfully winding in his line to a rod's length or so, seemed to make up his mind to be sociable with the lofty society that had descended upon him. He waded out of the pool.

"Would you like to try a cast, sir?" said he, offering his rod to the Prince.

The Prince, though unfamiliar with fly fishing, especially for salmon, was a sportsman, and had all a sportsman's love of new ventures. Readily, therefore, he accepted the Colonel's offer, and, under instruction, made a cast of the fly; and all the company was subdued into silence and attention by the fear of frightening the fish. The Count von Saxe sought to whisper with Mamie, and with a low "'Sh" and her finger on her lip, she led him a yard or two back among the bracken. The first cast achieved nothing, after a tolerable period of waiting, and a second was made. As luck would have it, the fly was almost immediately sucked under, and the line began to run out.

"Hey! *hold!* Colonel!" cried the Prince, "I think I have him!"

"It is Prince's luck!" exclaimed the excited Colonel; "the salmon is a royal fish!" His hands were now itching for the rod. "Don't try to haul him in, sir! You will lose him!" he cried.

"I think, Colonel," said the Prince, "I am not enough expert yet. Will you take your rod?"

Instantly the Colonel had the rod in his hand, and was wading out again into the pool, carefully playing the fish in its dives and rushes. All were again silent in eager expectation of the event. Even Meg had laid down her own rod and come to look on.

"If he gets over the lip of the pool and down that rapid," murmured the Colonel, "it will be a bad job! By Jove! he's a fine fish, by the pull of him! Meg, stand in your old place on that boulder! The sight of you may keep him from trying that lip!"

Meg, with a half-deprecatory glance at the Prince, resumed her former station.

"But," observed the Prince, in a low voice,

"if I were the salmon, that would only draw me there!"

"Perhaps not, if there were a man pulling you with a hook the other way, Prince," said Mamie, who was close to him.

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the Prince. "Perhaps not, miss."

But the rest did not hear. They were engrossed with the play of the fish, and the expert and cunning way in which the Colonel steadily drew him in while seeming to let him do as he would. At length the fish was landed and gaffed amid the hurrahs of the Prince and his friend.

"I agree with you, Colonel," cried the Prince, in a fine breeze of enthusiasm, "the salmon fishing is jollier sport than the deer shooting! I agree with you: it is much jollier! So, I will catch salmon, instead of shooting deer; and you will teach me, Colonel—*hein?*"

"I shall be happy, sir," said the Colonel, with a lack of enthusiasm of which the hearty, breezy Prince took no note, "to put you in the way of it, and to give you what tips I know about flies and that sort of thing."

"Tips!" exclaimed the Prince. "Yes, that is the thing. And flies! You will teach me. I am exceedingly obliged, Colonel! It will be jolly!—very jolly, indeed! There are rods, and boots, and all kinds of things in the castle."

The Prince cast a keen glance at Meg. What did she think of his declaration in favour of fishing? She was conscious of his glance. She blushed. She did not now believe that the Prince had come that morning merely because the Cancellarius had brought him, and—unaccountably to herself—she was pleased.

"May I begin to-morrow morning, Colonel?" asked the Prince, with his eye on Meg.

"If you like, sir," answered the Colonel.

The salmon—judged by the Colonel and Meg to weigh at least fourteen pounds—was determined to be a sufficient catch for the day.

"You will come to the manse and eat a morsel of lunch with us, will you not, sir?" said the Colonel: he could do no less than give the invitation, since it was already lunch-time, and the Prince said nothing of returning to Ardnashiell. "This fellow," said he, holding out the

salmon, "is really your catch, and it is only proper you should help to eat him."

"With pleasure, Colonel," said the Prince, "with very great pleasure."

On the way back to the manse he had the wit and cunning—simple, guileless, and frank though he seemed—to devote himself to the Colonel, talking of fish and deer and gently drifting into agreeable reminiscences of their acquaintance in Boeotia, while Meg walked on the other side of her father in unembarrassed silence, listening to the chatter of Mamie and the Count von Saxe who came behind.

"And shall we go catching trout to-morrow," said the Count, "when Prince Hermann is learning to fish for salmon?"

"'Sh! not so loud!" said Mamie.

"I believe," said the Count, "he has not arranged for the teacher he would like to have."

He said that in a low voice; but Meg was keen of hearing, and she overheard.

"And I believe," answered Mamie, also in a low voice, "that the Prince is clever enough to seem stupid enough to need two teachers. But 'sh! Let us talk of something else!"

"Of yourself, for instance," said the Count; and Meg felt his smile on her back.

"No," answered Mamie, promptly; "of the salmon. What would *you* do with that salmon for lunch?"

"*Do* with it?" said the Count; "I would eat my share of it!"

"Don't be silly," said Mamie. "I mean, how would you treat it so that it should be ready for lunch in time?"

"I would treat it civilly, and request it to get dressed, or cooked—or whatever is proper—as quickly as possible."

"You're too absurd!" laughed Mamie.

"How would *you* treat it?" asked the Count.

"I would cut it into steaks," answered Mamie, "and grill them on a hot fire!"

"How horribly ferocious!" said the Count.

"Nice," said Mamie. "I like cooking things."

"And eating them," suggested the Count.

"Of course," answered Mamie. "I say," she observed, dropping her voice again, "wouldn't it be jolly if we had a picnic-lunch

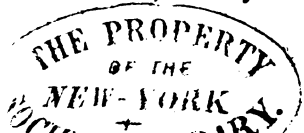
one day, and made a fire and cooked our trout?"

When they reached the manse they found Mrs. Herries-Hay and the Herr Cancellarius sitting together in the minister's study. She was doing her utmost to entertain him with her sweet manner and her soft conversation; but he looked—well, he gave the effect of having had enough for the occasion of both; whether because he now feared evil might come of this rash visit, or because he had sounded the shallowness of Mrs. Herries-Hay's well of information, it is impossible here to say. When the returned party found him he was droning "Soh!" to some remark of his companion, and he looked as if he had been droning "Soh!" for some time.

When the Colonel announced, with something of a sheep's face, to his wife that he had asked the Prince and his following to lunch, he was told that lunch was "on the way," so sure had Mrs. Herries-Hay been of her ground; and lunch was expedited to such purpose that they sat down to the meal in a quarter of an hour. They were somewhat crowded; but that only

made it "jollier" to the Prince's mind. There were, however, two anxious people at the table. The one, Colonel Herries-Hay, being a simple soldier, showed his anxiety by a concentrated silence alternated with an exuberant talkativeness; the other, the Herr Cancellarius, being a courtier though a student, betrayed his by an unusual smoothness of manner and subtlety of glance.

Yet the luncheon went off well enough. The Prince, from his place at Mrs. Herries-Hay's right hand, rattled agreeably to her, and to the Herr Cancellarius on her other hand, concerning their inquiry into the antiquities of the castle and the neighbourhood, and thus ingeniously he kept them from questions concerning his own doings and interests. The shrewd Mrs. Herries-Hay suspected some such purpose in his talk, and was confirmed in her view by the aspect of her husband and her elder daughter. Meg was, on the whole, quiet and serious, but there was a touch of unusual excitement on her cheek, and a sparkle of excitement in her eye; while the Colonel (whose moods and manners were, it may be supposed, familiar to his wife)



behaved as if he were irritated by a teazle in his shirt; she guessed his immediate desire was that their distinguished guests should be gone as soon as possible. Surveying (with her mind's eye) her field of action, she came to the conclusion that it would be wise to put a period to the considerable advantage she had that day gained. Moreover, she wished to allay a suspicion which she suspected in the mind of the Cancellarius, that the Prince's inclination towards her daughter was being encouraged and promoted by her and her husband.

"I am afraid, Herr Cancellarius," said she, aside, to him, seizing her opportunity when the Prince was entangled in a discussion on the red deer with the Colonel and the Count von Saxe—"that, after all, you will regret coming over here to-day: you will reckon your morning mispent?"

"Madam," said he, "that is not possible in your interesting and charming society."

"Ah, Herr Cancellarius," she answered, smiling softly, but shaking her head, "compliments are for the young. I am sure you would rather be back in the library of the castle among

your books, and your pupil with you, engaged in the occupations proper to his rank: he is still your pupil, is he not?"

"That is so, madam," said the Cancellarius, "so, in the sense of the Latin *tutor*: I am with him on the part of his father, the king."

"And, of course, to see that he gets into no mischief," said she, smiling as in genial confidence, and touching the point with the boldness of apparent simplicity.

"That is so, madam," responded the Cancellarius, and his puffed-out eyes shone above his pink cheeks with a gleam of intelligence and confidence. "*Yuventoose* is immer in need of the head and the hand of control and direction: that is so, madam."

Mrs. Herries-Hay did not know that the Cancellarius' strange word was the Latin *juventus* (which means *youth*), but she guessed his meaning, and assented to it. "You may well say so indeed, Cancellarius!" she exclaimed, with an obvious sense of responsibility.

"Always—it is the word, I think—always

will I be proud that we so well agree, madam." And the Cancellarius made a courtly inclination of his head over his glass.

"A mother's trials and anxieties are innumerable, Cancellarius," said she, imparting a soft low touch of extraordinary confidence to her very ordinary words.

"From the beginning cry of birth to the parting tear of bride: that is so, madam."

Thus they talked until they rose from the table to take coffee in the garden. That final flourish at an end, the Cancellarius, who had palpably been waiting for the moment, said aside to the Prince, "It is time, is it not, sir, that we go? It is not well to weary these good people of our society."

"Ha, it is true!" said the Prince, at the suggestion that he might be wearying his hosts. "We will go." Instantly he rose to say adieu. "I thank you, madam and Colonel," said he, with his frank, cheery politeness, "for a most delightful morning." Then, breaking into his more breezy manner, he exclaimed, "To-morrow I come, Colonel, all prepared! *Himmel!* what fish we will catch—*hein?*"

A COLONEL INVITES A PRINCE TO LUNCH 71

The Cancellarius and Mrs. Herries-Hay caught each other's glance of surprise at hearing of an arrangement for further intimacy, and Mrs. Herries-Hay had the wisdom to subdue any spark of triumph in hers.

CHAPTER VI

“BEHOLD, HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER”

“Now, what are we going to do about this?” demanded the Colonel, when his distinguished guests were gone and he had lighted a second cheroot to compose himself. “That’s what I want to know!”

His wife and his daughters looked at him solemnly, all three, for an instant, and the Colonel glanced uneasily over their heads and scratched his cheek.

“You mean about the Prince’s fishing, John?” came his wife’s soft voice.

“Yes,” said the Colonel, with something of an uncertain drawl.

“That is so!” murmured his younger daughter, imitating the droning phrase of the Herr Cancellarius. Her family gazed in severe wonder at her frivolity, but she appeared unconscious of their criticism.

"But why 'we,' John?" asked Mrs. Herries-Hay. "It was you, I suppose, that agreed to teach him?"

"It was," he sadly permitted. He was abashed before his wife: he who had blamed her for compassing the presence of the Prince had done more than she could have done to ensure and continue it. It troubled him sorely. "It was a foolish thing to agree to; but what could I do—or say—when he point-blank asked me?"

"It was a difficult moment, dear," said his wife in a soothing voice, but with absolute non-committal.

"It was," said he; "doosed difficult! But how can I get out of it?"

"Get out of it, father?" exclaimed both his daughters in a breath: their mother held her fire and waited.

He glanced from the one daughter to the other, and said, with enforced irony—for he was becoming more composed and more combative, "It may seem odd, but that's what I want to do."

"But you promised, father!" said Meg, looking at him with troubled eyes.

“ ‘ Shall be happy, sir, to put you in the way of it, and give you what tips I know ’—that’s what you said, father,” added Mamie, with her plait pulled over her shoulder to peruse its bow.

The veteran warrior actually blushed under his daughter’s quotation: he had not remembered that he had so deeply committed himself.

“ If you really said that, John dear,” observed his wife, with an even, soft, suasive voice, “ well, I don’t see what there is for you but do as you said.”

“ Except,” said he, desperately, and doubtfully avoiding her gaze, “ give up everything, and clear out at once: put it to the account of a sudden summons on business.”

It was plain he had entertained the wild, preposterous notion. Mrs. Herries-Hay was inexpressibly shocked. She sat up in her basket garden-chair.

“ John,” she murmured, softly, but firmly, “ what *are* you thinking of?”

“ Break off our holiday in the middle and go away!” exclaimed Mamie. “ Oh, daddy!”

Meg said nothing for a moment; but she gazed at her father and she furiously thought.

"John dear," said his wife, in a soft mellow tone of reproof and encouragement, "you must have a certain respect for your own engagement. He can't help being a Prince, poor fellow!"

"And a man and brother," said the Colonel, with a feeble effort at sarcasm, "as the undergraduate remarked about the Don."

"And he is a gentleman, and so is his friend!" observed his younger daughter.

"My dear child," said the Colonel, "what do you know about gentlemen? You had better go and play with your dolls."

"Oh, father!" She arose in indignation. "You *know* I don't have dolls! I'm *not* a child! And if you think me so, and are not just saying it, it's only because mother and you keep me in short skirts!"

"My dear," said her mother, softly, "you forget yourself!"

"You are nasty, cruel, insulting things!—both of you!" said the girl; and departed with her ornamented plait in her mouth.

"That girl needs discipline!" observed the Colonel, nodding his head and touching off the ash from his cheroot.

Then, at length, Meg brought herself to the point of speech. "Father," said she, "may I say what I think? I, at least, am not a child."

"No, Meg," said her father, wondering what was to come, "you're not a child. But it is not wise even for grown-ups to say always what they think."

"Well, you shall stop me, father," said she, seriously, but quietly and steadily, stroking back the while from her temple a loosened bit of hair with a hand which was large for a woman's, but admirably and generously shaped, "if I seem to be saying more than I should say." (It was notable that Meg's conversation when she was truly serious became punctiliously careful and grammatical: she had such a conscience about correctness and clearness of expression as few women possess; and yet she was no precisian.)

"All right, Meg, go on," said the Colonel, with a side-glance at his wife, who looked troubled about the eyes: she never knew what licence of frankness this frank and serious daughter of hers might permit herself, without so much as winking or changing the tone of her voice.

"I believe I am right, father, in supposing that in this—this business about teaching Prince Hermann to fish, you are worried on my account," said Meg, and paused.

"Go on," said her father, looking at the ash of his cheroot and wondering if it would fall.

"I mean," continued Meg, "you don't believe he really cares about the fishing much, but that he wishes to be—well, yes—wishes to be with me."

"Meg, my dear!" exclaimed her mother, with an expression of outrage on her face and in her tone.

"What's the matter, mother?"

"My dear, that's one of the things—well, a delicate-minded young lady doesn't *say* that sort of thing even if she thinks it!"

"Shall I stop, father?" asked Meg.

"Fiddle-de-dee, Maggie!" said the Colonel to his wife. And then, "Go on, Meg."

"Well, then, it seems to me," continued Meg, "that you will be relieved from your worry, and may still fulfil your promise to the Prince, if I give up fishing with you at present and keep mother and Mamie company."

Father and mother glanced at each other, as if to demand an instant's pause to consider how the antagonistic position of each to the other would be affected by their daughter's declaration. Then the Colonel manifestly rejoiced, while a sweet resignation was shed abroad upon the countenance of his wife: she already had so much the advantage in her design that she could afford to wait.

"Well, Meg, my dear," said the Colonel, "if you really don't mind, that would, I think, be a good way out of the difficulty."

"Yes," assented his wife. "I never thought salmon-fishing at any time a lady-like amusement."

"Nor angling of any kind, mother?" said her daughter, with a query: she rose and departed with the stately gait of a queen.

"I could be angry with her," said her mother, following her with a full eye of approval, "if she were not so very handsome. You don't seem to see it, John."

"Oh, yes, I do," said the Colonel, throwing away the end of his cheroot. He rose and looked at his wife. He foolishly believed he

had spoiled her little game, and he felt generously and tenderly towards her. "You haven't been out much to-day, Maggie: suppose I take you for a walk or drive?"

"I think a drive for preference, John," answered his wife, amiably.

Meanwhile Meg had encountered Mamie lurking among the currant bushes, and was pounced on for a rehearsal of the end of the interview with their parents.

"Oh," said Meg, carelessly, "it's settled that father carries out his promise to the Prince. I offered to leave salmon-fishing alone for the time and keep you and mother company, and then," she continued, plucking a leaf and rubbing it to make it smell, "father saw his way!"

"Meg!" exclaimed Mamie, "you *are* a goose! I don't think I could be so great a goose if I tried! Besides, I don't want you trapesing about with me—and mamma!"

"No, I suppose you don't," said Meg. "I had almost forgotten that: you want to go catching trout with the Count von Saxe."

"Oh, you heard him say that, I suppose! And it was all for your sake I arranged it,

Meg!" she petulantly broke out. "And you're a great, ungrateful cat!"

"How for my sake?" asked Meg, awake with wonder.

"It's you the Prince wants and expects to teach him to fish!" exclaimed Mamie. "And it was only to keep the Count von Saxe out of the way that I agreed to take him to catch trout! He will be miserably disappointed and will blame me!"

"Who will?" asked Meg, sharply.

"The Prince, of course! He loves you! He adores you! You've no idea how he adores you!"

"Be quiet! Hold your tongue!" said Meg, passionately. She seized her sister's hands and held them tight, as if to hear another word from her would be a painful stab. A high colour was on her cheek, and a bright light in her eye; but the astonished Mamie could not tell whether they denoted anger or some other passion. "How dare you—my sister—talk like that? How dare you meddle and arrange anything?"

Mamie was quite broken and overcome by such energy. She wept. "If it weren't that I

admired you and loved you so, you great, ungrateful cat, I'd have never arranged anything!"

The great-hearted elder sister took her to her bosom. "Don't cry, dear! Don't cry, silly Mamie! But why don't you understand that it would be stark, staring madness for me to think of a Prince? Why don't you understand that, dear? It's as impossible for me to—to marry a Prince, as it would be to marry the angel Gabriel!"

"I don't see why," declared Mamie, with a sob. "I've seen a queen and princesses, and so have you, and not one of them looked so splendid and beautiful as you, Meg! Besides, all the way from here to the water he was humming to himself, 'I'd crowns resign to call her mine!' and you can guess what that means!"

Meg was not accessible to small flatteries, but that smote her strangely. In silence she dried her sister's eyes, took her arm, and led her gently away.

CHAPTER VII

PREVARICATION

NEXT morning the Prince and his friend von Saxe arrived in a dog-cart and a fine breeze of cheerfulness, with a "Hoy, *holà*, Colonel!" From the interior of the vehicle rods and boots—huge boots to reach up the thighs—were produced; and those were laid upon a Highland lad, who bore also their case of sandwiches for lunch and their flask of usquebagh. The Colonel received them on the green before the manse; the dog-cart was dismissed; and they were ready to start.

"But," said the Prince, "is there no other one to come, Colonel?"

The Colonel wilfully misunderstood him. "I do not take a gillie with me: I carry my own boots and tackle."

"But does not Miss Herries-Hay come?"

said the Prince. He blushed when he had said it; for, in truth, he was a young man of an ingenuous habit.

"Not to-day, sir," answered the Colonel. "She is bound to keep her mother and sister company sometimes; and they are gone—some-where or other—in the phaeton."

The bright blue eyes of the Prince shot forth a glance of suspicion—a glance which the old soldier did not meet.

"Soh, let us march," said he, "to catch the salmon."

At first he was sulky and silent, like a disappointed school-boy; and von Saxe, walking betwixt him and the Colonel, had to carefully maintain the communications of easy converse. But his attention became somewhat diverted as they went on, and his temper improved, though he continued sad and troubled. The Colonel, divining the reason of the young man's changed demeanour, conceived a greater kindness for him, and took more pains than he might have taken to instruct him in the mysteries of fishing for salmon with a fly; and the Prince showed an aptitude for instruction, a docility which won

upon the heart of the old soldier more than he was aware.

It happened, therefore, that when his young daughter (who, as he said in a brilliant moment, was "more subtle than any beast of the field," spite of her show of irresponsibility)—when she appeared about tea-time and asked if they would not like to cease their fishing for the day and come to the manse for a cheering cup, even the Colonel himself hailed the proposal with relief and pleasure; and when he noted how a boyish delight arose and brightened over the Prince's countenance, he felt for him: and that, although he was quite aware he was giving with the one hand what in the morning he had taken away with the other.

At tea, Meg and the Prince were acutely conscious of each other, though they sat well apart. Mrs. Herries-Hay (to whom, after all, belonged the honours of the day) looked a little heated, but undoubtedly triumphant. She asked the Prince, with perfect self-possession, if he took sugar—and cream; for a lady who is in the way of serving tea in the ancient, homely fashion would probably ask these questions if she were

within an hour of her dissolution. The Prince gladly took both, and bread and butter and cake; for he was young—(he was only three-and-twenty, and any young man of our Northern races is very young at that age)—and he was enjoying himself as thoroughly as if he were a school-boy out of bounds.

“Ha, ha!” he laughed, in his gleeful note. “This is very jolly!—very jolly, indeed! You say, in the English language, ‘so happy as a king’! That is not a wise saying. I know kings and queens and how happy they are; and, I assure you, I prefer to be here!”

That was a long speech for the Prince, and it was listened to with becoming attention and gratitude.

“It is very sweet of you, sir, to say so,” softly cooed Mrs. Herries-Hay.

“But it is true, madam!” asseverated the Prince.

“Sweet and true!” foolishly murmured Mammie. “Will you pass me the cake, please, Count?”

“But why should we be always thinking of what will make us happy?” The question came

from Meg, to everybody's surprise, and apparently to her own. She was a serious young lady, and an earnest; but she blushed deeply at the sound of her own words.

"Happiness," chimed in the Colonel, all too readily, "is not caught by running after it."

"Nor by fishing for it," whispered Mamie, aside, to the Count von Saxe, who received her small jest with glad approval.

The Prince glanced from the Colonel to Meg with a pathetic kind of deprecation in his eye. "Ah," said he, sadly and somewhat doubtfully, "we arrive at the metaphysic." He added with an agreeable touch of boyish simplicity of belief in what he said, shaded with a doubt whether he ought to say it—"I always try to be happy."

Mrs. Herries-Hay thought she had a word to say, and she said it, sending at her husband a severe shaft of reproof at the same time from her fine eyes. "I have seen a great many young men in my time, sir"—the Prince bowed—"and I have never found that those who tried to be happy were worse soldiers than those who were always talking about their duty."

"But, yes!" cried the Prince, promptly per-

ceiving that Mrs. Herries-Hay's opinion was a reinforcement of his own; "because duty is something not to talk about, but something to do."

"That is quite true, sir," said the Colonel.

"And sometimes it is our duty," urged the Prince, "to think very much about what will make us happy—not for a day happy, but for a very long time: is it not so? Ha, ha!" he laughed, and glanced with involuntary homage towards Meg, who sat with her eyes downcast, thinking she had been a fool to raise this whiff of discussion, and wondering why she had done it. Presently, in a fit of boyish enthusiasm, the Prince rose, sat down to the open piano, and played and sang, on the wild impulse, *Kennst Du das Land wo die Citronen blühen?* He sang well: his voice was an excellent, rich baritone; and Meg knew and felt the song as she had never known and felt it before. She longed and panted for that remote, romantic land; and her longing was strangely compounded with sadness, and pain, and tears.

It was no wonder, then, that the Colonel, smoking a lonely cheroot when the Prince and

his companion were gone, shook his head, with a resolute gathering of the brows, and said to himself, "This won't do! We've got deeper in—and I thought we were going to wade out!" To his wife, when he encountered her presently, he said only, "It will be of no use sending for us to tea to-morrow afternoon, Maggie: we are going three or four miles up the water."

"That's a pity," said she, with soft commiseration. "We'll have to ask your company, then, to stay to dinner."

The Colonel was aghast at her audacity. "No, Maggie," he exclaimed, with great resolution, "we'll do nothing of the sort! 'Pon my word, you're too steep!"

"Very well, my dear," said she, with the sweetest wifely show of submission. "You ought to know best what politeness demands." But, for all that show, he felt utterly insecure, and helpless even, against her audacities and subtleties.

Next morning the Prince returned with the Count von Saxe to continue his practice of salmon-fishing. He made no comment on Meg's absence again, but set off in the Colonel's com-

pany with resignation and cheerfulness, which the Colonel laid to the account of the excellent promise of sport. It was a dull morning: there had been rain in the night; and the Colonel anticipated that the fish would rise well. They returned to the fishing-ground of the day before, with the intention of working up the water for some distance. It was to be remarked that the Count von Saxe (who did not fish), after lingering a little while to watch the progress of the Prince, sauntered idly off and disappeared. And it might have been still further remarked that, after he had gone from the view of the Prince and the Colonel, he quickened his pace, and set off legging it over the heather. Whither? And why?

When John Macaulay, after the departure of the Colonel, knocked at the parlour door and thrust his head into the room to say, "Will ye be needing the sheltie put in, mem?" Mrs. Herries-Hay answered, "What do you think of the weather, John?"

"I think I'd not be wrong, indeed and mirover, in saying it'll *haud up*, mem," said John.

"The clouds look heavy," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, gazing out of the window.

John took a step into the room to look through the window also, as if the clouds seen from within and seen from without might be different affairs. "Ay, mem," said he, "they dae that."

"But you don't think it will rain?"

"Well, mem, I'll no swear it winna; but for a' that"—and he looked at the clouds again—" 'od, ay, I think it'll *haud up*."

"Well, John, I think I'll not go out this forenoon: I'll get some letters written."

"Just that, mem. I'll no say that mayna be best. And what will the young leddies be after, mem?"

"I suppose, John," answered Mrs. Herries-Hay, with a blank lack of interest, "they'll go for a walk, or something."

"What ails Miss Meg at the fushin', mem? Is she scunnered at the salmon?"

"No, John, no; I think not. I think she has just begun it and left off, as girls do."

"Ay, mem, gir-rls'll be wonnerfu' ill to guide. But now, mem, the salmon"—as if he

would say, "Let us keep to the subject"—"it's a grand fush the salmon, nae doubt; but for a' that, mem, I'll not be thinking so high mysel' o' the salmon as I do o' the trout. Eh, woman," he cried, in a burst of enthusiasm, "the trout's as bonny as a fernitickled * face; and it's maist delicious provender, forbye!"

"No doubt, John; no doubt," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, a little bored with the prolongation of the interview.

"And it will just be this I will say, mem," continued John, "if it's the salmon that's scunnered Miss Meg, there's aye the trout to try; and it's a fine occupation catchin' the trout, and I'm no that ill a hand at it mysel', however."

"I see what you mean, John," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, with the quick sense of having discovered a new opening for experiment towards the end she had set herself; "perfectly. You can find the girls—they're in the study, I think—and give them your views on trout-fishing."

"Just that, mem," said John, and departed.

* Freckled.

So it came to pass that John Macaulay, solemn of visage, but rapt of eye, appeared, like the "god from the machine," to deliver Mamie from an awkward situation. That young lady, having been accused yestereen by the Count von Saxe of being a "fair deceiver," because she had not fulfilled her promise of teaching him her method of guddling for trout, had given assurance that she would that morning fulfil it, and to that end would meet him at a certain place. She had put on her stoutest boots, and was lacing them—when her sister looked up from a book she was reading to ask carelessly where she was going. Now Mamie, being tolerably unpractised in the ways of deceit, made the entirely vague and utterly unsatisfactory answer that she was going "out," which was too obvious not to provoke suspicion. Meg gave her attention to it, considered, and exclaimed,

"Mamie! you're going out to meet the Count von Saxe."

"I'm going out, if you *must* know," said Mamie, still bending over her boot-lace, "to catch trout."

"Mamie," said Meg, "don't prevaricate."

"I won't," answered Mamie; "but I didn't know *prevaricate* meant that."

"Meant what, you wriggler?" demanded Meg.

"Fall into the water, of course," said Mamie, standing up and straightening herself, but not venturing to look her sister in the face.

"Mamie," said Meg, "you mustn't go!"

Then Mamie, provoked by the tone, turned. "Why not?"

"Because it's not proper, dear."

"Oh, I haven't your absurd notions of propriety!" And she was going out to put on her Tam o' Shanter.

Meg rose. "Don't go, dear!" she said.

"What nonsense!" said Mamie. "I must: I promised." And she opened the door.

"If you go," said Meg, "I must tell mother—and father, too."

Mamie turned, half subdued, half defiant. "Then you're a *tiddly-tiddly-tell-tale-tit!*"

It was at that crucial and critical moment that John Macaulay appeared, set before them his views on trout-fishing, and advanced his pro-

posal that they should go with him and be instructed in *his* method of angling for trout. The sisters looked at each other in mutual concession.

"Shall we go, Mamie?" said Meg. "We can go your way—the way you wish. *Le brave Jean*," she added, with a smile, "*regularise la situation.*"

"All right," said Mamie, "I don't mind."

So they set off with a light fishing-rod each and with a supply of the particular kind of bait which John Macaulay affected, and in due time they came upon the Count von Saxe.

"How did you manage to bring your sister?" the Count asked Mamie, in a whisper.

"I didn't; she came," was her answer.

"But you promised to bring her," said the Count.

"I'm afraid I make rash promises," said the girl.

The trout stream was a small tributary of the Conacher Water, and John Macaulay's favourite fishing-ground was a "pot" or two in its noisy, babbling course. Meg was restive and impatient, and after a little while she begged

the Count von Saxe to take her rod and try his hand, while she wandered down the stream.

"She will meet Prince Hermann," murmured the Count von Saxe to Mamie.

"Does that matter?" said Mamie. "I suppose he won't eat her, or drown her, or anything of that sort?"

"Oh, no," said the Count, "nothing of that sort."

Margaret Herries-Hay wandered down the stream, away quite out of sight and hearing of the trout-fishers, on for a mile or more. As she neared the junction of the burn with the water—of the small stream with the large—the ground became boggy. She climbed to the top of a bare and rugged promontory that divided the beds of the two streams.

"Perhaps," she thought within herself, "I may just spy them fishing without their seeing me."

From the crown of the ascent she looked down upon the roaring Conacher Water. Almost in midstream she spied a fisher wading and casting his line—a solitary salmon-fisher—who was apparently Prince Hermann, at any

rate plainly not her father. Wondering where her father might be, she went more openly forward to get a view down the water and up. The fisher clearly saw her. He took off his hat and waved it; and heedless of rod and line (which he allowed to drag over his shoulder as they would) he began laboriously wading towards her.

“ Oh, take care!—take care! ” she cried; and set off, running downhill at the maddest speed. “ Stand still where you are! ”

There was a deep pool or “ pot ” in his way, of which she knew, but of which he must be ignorant. She dropped her eyes an instant to look to her career downhill; when she looked forth upon the water again, the fisher had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII

“THE FAIR WHITE FEET OF NICOLETE”

MEG tore headlong and panting to the water's edge. If he were drowned, it was altogether because in gladness of heart he was coming in haste to speak to her! Her bosom uncontrollably rose and fell: she could have wept for the pity and the folly of it! He rose to the surface of the treacherous pool, bareheaded (both hat and rod were floating swiftly off to the dangerous rapid below); he shook the water from his hair and eyes and looked at her with a smile—the wonderful smile of Love or of Death!—and began to swim towards her. He could swim, but he was heavily cumbered with his soaked clothes, his fishing-basket, and his great boots. Meg seized the gaff, which lay on the bank, and unhesitatingly waded into the water: she was familiar with the deeps and the shallows both.

"This way!" she cried, making for the lower lip of the sullen pool.

He turned that way at her bidding; but a strong current set towards the dangerous rapid below, and it held him in its deadly grip. Strive as he might with swimming, he was drifting from her, and he could not recover a footing. She waded out carefully till she was up to her waist in the water, and the current pulled at her to carry her away too. Another step and she might be out of her depth, and then there would be nothing but a watery death for both! She reached out her farthest with the gaff, and—just in time—caught the gaff-hook in the strap of his fishing-basket. She drew him towards her. He recovered a footing. But he was heavy with water, and dazed with his struggle, and he reeled and might have fallen again; she reached forth to him her hand—a steady strong white hand—and he was safe; and thus, hand in hand, they waded heavily out.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Prince Hermann, when they had reached the shore; "that was very droll!—very droll indeed! A great fish like me to plunge into a hole and make the sal-

mon afraid!—and you to come and *gaff* me!—
Ha, ha!"

But Meg was serious and open-eyed. "Don't laugh, please!" said she. "You might have been drowned! Another moment, and nothing could have saved you—short of a miracle!"

"Ah," said he, "I was not born to be drowned!" Then, looking on her seriousness, he was serious also, and moved. "Do not think I do not understand! It is you have saved me and I am grateful, through all my heart and soul! And you risked your own life! And," he added, with a simple tenderness, "you are very wet!"

At that she took alarm. "Come," said she, "there is a keeper's cottage up here a little way. We shall get some kind of dry things there." She looked at him. "You ought to pull those great boots off; but you cannot run in your stocking feet."

"These boots are of seven leagues," said he. "Ha! ha!—I can walk very fast in them."

"Perhaps it is best," said she. "The violent exercise will keep you from catching cold."

So they set off at the swiftest possible walk,

and it must be said for the Prince that he managed to keep up with her best pace. Ten minutes took them to the keeper's cottage, and the keeper's wife (who knew Meg, but evidently did not know the Prince) received them with an explosion of amazement.

"Gosh be here!" she cried, with her bare, stout arms stuck in the soap-suds of her washing-tub, "but ye're drowned!"

"Not altogether, *meine frau*," laughed the Prince. "Ha, ha!—but wet, very wet. This young lady is soaked."

"Deed and ye are, my lass," said the woman. "A dram's the thing to keep the cauld frae your bones!" She swept the soap-suds from her arms, and stepped to a cupboard from which she took a black whiskey bottle and a dram-glass.

"Oh, Mrs. MacPherson," said Meg, "if you could only give us some dry things, of any sort!"

"Dry claes? Hoot, aye!" said the brawny Highland wife, surveying Meg for an instant with generous and critical eye. "Ye can ha'e my Sabbath gown—and a dud or two forbye that needna be named afore folk. They'll set

ye fine; ye're just my ain figure. But ye winna blaud * it," she added, with cautioning eye; "it's a black silk, wi' gimp trimming." Clearly the good-wife expected the young lady to be impressed with the magnificence of the gown; and the young lady was.

"I couldn't think, Mrs. MacPherson," said she, "of putting on your very best gown. I wouldn't venture. Anything—any kind of skirt will do. And if you can find the—this gentleman anything, he will be grateful, I'm sure." She was going to declare him "the Prince," but on a warning motion of his eye she refrained.

"Hoot, ay!" said the good-wife. "I'se fit you both out wi' something or other. Hae, my lass, tak' that up first."

She pressed upon Meg the dram of whiskey. Meg put to her lips the fiery spirit, and then abstained, and returned the glass with a grateful, but spasmodic smile. Mrs. MacPherson instantly passed the dram on to the Prince.

"You can tak' it off, sir, I'se warrant," said she.

* Soil.

"With pleasure, madam," said the Prince; and after a bow to Meg, he "took off" the dram. Its potency gripped him by the throat. "It is very good *schnapps*," said he.

"Snaps!" echoed the good-wife, a little puzzled, but apparently more offended and suspicious. "It's gran' whuskey, man!"

From a press or cupboard she bundled out some clothes of her husband's, saying to the Prince, "Ye can get into them, I'se warrant: my man's a bit bigger nor you, sir. And there's his Sabbath blacks."

"Thank you very much, madam," said the Prince.

She regarded him with a backward eye of suspicion: she did not like his "madam." To her ear it had a foreign sound, and to her understanding something of an improper meaning. "Eh," said she, "you're welcome!" Then she hustled Meg "ben" the house, and produced for her (with more care and tenderness) a selection of garments. She lingered to see Meg make her change, to gossip, and, in more particular, to cross-question after the favourite Scottish fashion.

"It was at the salmon-fishing, of course?" said she.

"Yes," said Meg, beginning to strip off her wet clothes.

"And ye both fell in?"

"No," said Meg, "I didn't fall in." And being familiar with the Scottish habit of questioning, she thought she would answer all questions in advance by telling the story just as it happened. But that only served to whet Mrs. MacPherson's curiosity.

"Ay," said she, "just that. Ye left them wi' the trout, and took a daunder 'down the burn, Davie lad!' *Imphm!* maybe wi' a kind o' expectation that ye might see him at the salmon?"

Meg could not refrain from a blush. "I knew my father and he had gone after the salmon."

"To be sure ye did. Achy! But ye saw nothing o' your feyther, the Kornel?—only this lad that you're linked wi'?"

"'Linked wi'?' What do you mean, Mrs. MacPherson?"

"Hoot, lass, naething, but what ye ca' 'en-

gaged'! Did ye no say ye're engaged to the lad?"

"No, I didn't!" exclaimed Meg, with a touch of heat. "He's just a—a friend of my father's."

"Ay, just that. I didna mind. I've no head for distinctions o' that kind." Meg had discovered that (as the phrase goes) every rag she wore was wet, and she was hurrying everything off. "Eh," exclaimed Mrs. MacPherson, suddenly, "but ye've as bonny a white skin as ever I saw! I had nae bonnier mysel' at your age!"

"Go away, Mrs. MacPherson!" cried Meg, in a quick flush of modesty, gathering her wet garments about her again. "Go away! I won't do anything till you go away!"

"Hoot, lass, dinna mind me, I'm only an auld wife!" But she rose to go; and as she went she added, "But I like as weel to see a bonny lass as ony man!"

Meanwhile the Prince had been labouring to pull off his great wet boots. He had removed most of his upper garments without any difficulty, but the boots baffled him.

"Go away!" he roared, when he heard the tread of Mrs. MacPherson's generous foot.

"Eh, dinna mind me, my bonny man!" exclaimed Mrs. MacPherson. "Ye're stuck at the boots; they'll be wet in as weel as out. I can gi'e ye a haul, man." And she advanced to render assistance.

"Go away!" cried the Prince again. "Send your husband to me; I hear him or some man outside."

"Gosh be here!" exclaimed Mrs. MacPherson, going out, "the daintiness o' them!"

"And," said the Prince, in relating the incident afterwards to the Colonel, "I blushed, and Mrs. MacPherson didn't."

MacPherson himself entered presently, to the relief of the Prince. The Prince related the story of his accident, and entered into further conversation with MacPherson, the while he endowed himself in the keeper's best clothes.

Meg lingered at her toilet. She was thoughtful; and she was fastidious about what she put on. The open admiration of Mrs. MacPherson and her words had provoked in Meg a curiosity concerning her own person. Was she really

nice to look at? she shyly asked herself. Was it truly an agreeable and lovely thing to have a white skin? There was a tolerably large chimney-glass "ben" in the tiny parlour where Meg was closeted, and she considered the reflection therein of her neck and shoulders till she was ashamed. Then in haste she continued her dressing. She could not wear the gown Mrs. MacPherson had put out for her—positively she could not! She would look a perfect fright in it! She would rather wear no gown at all: nothing over the seemly blue petticoat, like a fish-wife's: would that be too remarkable? Not, surely, in Mrs. MacPherson's eyes, who was similarly dressed herself. And over the simple white calico bodice she would pin, shawl-wise, a large coloured silk 'kerchief which was set out for her use. She came to her stockings. She was aghast to discover that those proudly provided by Mrs. MacPherson were great, thick worsted, ribbed things, with an extraordinary dimension of foot, and (let it be merely whispered) not too clean, for Meg's fastidious taste. If their coarseness and size did not utterly repel her, her doubt of their purity did. It was impossible

that she should wear them! she would rather go bare-legged for ever than wear such things! She was resolved; and she flung them aside.

There came a new vexation. Without stockings, how could she wear shoes or boots?—such boots as those set out for her? She took them in her hand and perused them in disgust: they were of the variety called "spring-sided"; across the toes they were bulged and nubblly; and they were certainly two or three sizes too large. What a ridiculous fright she would look in these and her very abbreviated skirt, with an extension of bare ankle showing between! If the skirt were long, or if the boots were shoes and small, it might not have mattered; but in the short blue petticoat and in these boots, without stockings!—the vision of herself was too appalling! Her alternatives were reduced to one: to appear both stockingless and shoeless. Would that look nice? or would it seem improper? She sat down to consider her feet. She had seen them before, but had not thought about them, if I may say so, and had not understood them, therefore. Now she gave them her attention. They were white (which seemed a

considerable point in their favour, if Mrs. MacPherson was to be believed). They seemed well-shaped, if she might judge from the feet she had seen in pictures and on statues. They were neither large nor small. The toes were straight, the instep was prettily arched, and the heel and ankle were not too thick. Evidently they were feet she had no need to be ashamed of. She remembered she had gone about barefoot in the summer holidays by the sea or in the Highlands, when she was a little girl. All girls and many women in the Highlands were going barefoot even while she sat there considering; and, indeed, the wonder was that Mrs. MacPherson was not barefoot herself. Could there be any impropriety in her now appearing barefoot? Still she sat, and looked at her feet, and considered.

Someone knocked. Meg started erect.

"I'll be out in a moment," she said.

"It's only me," said the voice of Mrs. MacPherson. "I was won'ering if ye would wish me to slip down to the water to tell the Kornel that ye're no drowned: *he* may be won'ering what's got ye both."

"Oh, yes, please, Mrs. MacPherson, if you will be so kind!" said Meg.

"And," continued Mrs. MacPherson, "I was won'ering, too, if my man should step on to the manse to tell them the hobble ye're both in about your claites."

"Oh, if he will!" said Meg; and instantly she was faced with the fact that for some time she would be alone with the Prince!

In woman's fashion she had been playing at hide-and-seek with her feelings, and she had not recognised that all her hesitations about clothing had been, not on Mrs. MacPherson's account, nor on her own account, but solely on account of the Prince. Now she permitted her attention to dwell on the form of the Prince: how would he and she look, each to the other, in their strange guise, she wondered; and unaccountably to herself she trembled and hesitated more and more. She heard Mrs. MacPherson and him engage in a brief conversation, and she listened acutely; but she made out nothing.

This is the brief conversation that proceeded.

"I'se put ye both out a sup o' cock-a-leekie,"

said Mrs. MacPherson, going to a great pot on the fire with a ladle and a pair of basins; "it will keep the cauld frae striking in."

"Ah," said the Prince, "the soup! Cock-a-leekie! And what is cock-a-leekie made of, Mrs. MacPherson?"

"Oh, sir," answered Mrs. MacPherson, "there's ingans * intilt, and leeks intilt, and carrots intilt, and——"

"But what is *intilt*, madam?" inquired the Prince.

"I'm just telling ye: there's ingans intilt, and leeks intilt, and carrots intilt——"

"Soh! But what, my dear madam," said the Prince again, "is *intilt*?"

"Bless and save the man! Am I no in the act o' telling ye? There's ingans intilt, and leeks intilt, and——"

"I beg you, madam," said the Prince, "to forgive my ignorance; but I do not know what is *intilt*."

"And me telling ye! Gosh be here!" she exclaimed, aside, "the man's a gype! . . .

* Onions.

Well," she added, "there's *a'thing* intilt! Noo, lets ha'e nae mair havers!" She set down the two basins on the table.

"And that," said the Prince, peering into the one and the other—"that's cock-a-leekie?"

"Ay, that's cock-a-leekie!" said the good-wife, conceiving she was being chaffed.

"It is very kind of you, madam," said the Prince.

"Imphm!" she grunted, going to the door, to depart on her errand to the Colonel.

"But I should like very much to know what is——"

"Hoots! gae 'wa, man!" she cried, and flounced off in dudgeon.

The Prince waited a moment, listening. Then he went "ben" and tapped at the door. "We must sup the soup of cock-a-leekie, Miss Herries-Hay, before it is cold," he said. "Are you not ready?"

"In one moment," answered Meg.

The Prince took a few steps up and down, waiting, and then returned to the door. "If you come not out, I open the door! I believe you are not well!"

"Oh," said Margaret, "I am quite well, thank you! But I have no stockings or shoes to put on!"

Instantly the Prince opened the door.

"Oh!" cried Margaret. She put her hands up to her heaving bosom and gazed at him like a startled wild thing.

He was smitten radiant with her charm. "But you are beautiful!" he murmured, ardently. "It is 'the fair white feet of Nicolette'!" He had, however, a true gentleman's tender compassion for her manifest distress. He said no more words of the moving sort. He bowed to her in very courtly, gallant style (forgetting altogether he was arrayed in the awkward Sunday "blacks" of MacPherson), and offered her his hand, saying, "Come, I pray you, the soup grows cold."

She rose to the height of his courtliness—thinking he had never looked better than in the ill-fitting blacks—gave him her hand, and stepped forth shyly, and beautifully barefoot.

CHAPTER IX

“OH, I DOUBT I DO”

“I AM an ass!” said the Prince, when he had conducted Meg to the table. He looked down at the damp, earthen floor. “Your feet will be made dirty, or they will be cold! Sit here!”

He placed a chair for her by the fire. He looked around and spied a square of wood—Mrs. MacPherson’s baking-board—and he seized that and spread it under Meg’s feet.

“Thank you,” said she, civilly, but softly. “But why should you bother?”

He made no reply; yet his conduct and the manner of it were answer enough. Having placed the board in the gentle radiance of the peat-fire, he handed her one of the basins of cock-a-leekie; and she felt herself invested with his ardour as with a warm vapour, and permeated with his tenderness as with a stimulant of intoxicating and delicious quality. He sat

down over against her, with his own basin of soup in his hand; and she dared not draw back her feet to hide them with her petticoat, because to do so would be a marked rejection of the board he had placed for her.

"This," said he, "is the soup of cock-a-leekie. Tell me," he exclaimed, "what is *intilt*?"

"*Intilt*?" repeated Meg, without comprehension.

"I ask Mrs. MacPherson what the cock-a-leekie is made of; and she say, 'Leeks *intilt*, carrots *intilt*,' etcetera. I ask, 'But what is *intilt*?' and she say only the same again. Again I ask, 'Excellent madam, Mrs. MacPherson, but—I pray you—what is *intilt*?' And she was angry and would not. Now I ask you, please, 'What is *intilt*?' what strange preparation?"

"*Intilt*," laughed Meg, "means '*in it*'; Mrs. MacPherson meant to say 'There's leeks *in it*, and carrots *in it*,' and so on."

"Good gracious!" he cried, "what a language! And that is all?"

"That is all," said she.

"And she thought I was playing with her!

—joking! Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed, and "Ha, ha, ha!" again. "No wonder she was cross! Ha, ha, ha!"

Meg, in her excited condition, caught the infection of his ringing laughter, and she laughed out too; upon which he was provoked to another peal. To a third person the laughter would have sounded incredibly foolish and baseless; but these two had the subtle sense that thus they relieved and enlivened a situation which had something of solemn absurdity about it.

"You do not see," said he, "that I am dressed in the best, the Sabbath clothes of the excellent MacPherson!"

"Oh, yes; I do," said she, with another laugh.

"And do you not think I look like a minister of the kirk?"

"Oh, no," said she; "not with that great military moustache!"

"Not even with this on my head?" He jumped to his feet, and from the open press, whence Mrs. MacPherson had produced the clothes, he took a tall hat—obviously Mac-

Pherson's Sunday best—and set it on his head. It fell down to his ears, and would have slipped further. “My head is not small,” said he, “but the excellent MacPherson's head must be as great as the pot!” And he pointed to the soup-cauldron that hung over the peats. “But am I not a minister?” and he let the hat hang down upon the nape of his neck, endeavoured to assume a solemn aspect, and murmured, “*It's a grand day for the fishin': the Lord be thankèd!* I cannot say your Scottish!”

“No,” laughed Meg, “you cannot be like a minister, whatever you do: you have not been brought up to be like that,” and she rose to set upon the table her half-consumed soup.

“Ah,” said he, darting forward, “permit me;” and he took the basin from her.

“That,” said she, and laughed again, “is still less like a minister: a proper-minded minister expects to be waited on.”

“Then,” he declared, with a comic abandonment, stuffing MacPherson's best hat back into the press, “I will be a person without any character at all! I will be a wandering minstrel,—blind!—and you shall lead me!”

He seized an old fiddle and bow that hung on the wall. The something of wild, irresponsible Scot that throbbed in her nature fell in with his mad, boyish humour; and she took his arm and solemnly seemed to lead him along the floor, the while, with a tolerable touch, he produced a plaintive note or two from the old fiddle.

"And now," said he, coming to a sudden halt and skipping back, with the light of folly shining in his eyes, "I will be an excited musician at a wedding!" With a vigorous stroke of the bow upon the catgut he dashed into a lively Highland spring, and set off footing it to the music. "Dance!" said he, with an inviting wag of his head, and Meg, with a laugh, swung her fish-wife's blue petticoat, and set to him gently on the earthen floor with her bare feet. On a sudden impulse the fiddle was on the table; his arms were about her; he had kissed her on the lips, and she had kissed him in return—ere a moment's reflection could edge in to make them pause.

"Ah," he murmured, "you are adorable!—how adorable!"

She sprang free from his embrace with an "Oh!" of amazement, and covered her hot face with her fingers.

He stood and leaned his hand on the table somewhat abashed. "Forgive me, dearest one!" said he; "I did not mean to surprise you! Not for all the world would I treat you but in honour, or harm a hair of your dear, beautiful head!"

"Oh, you should not!—you must not!" she murmured, from behind the screen of her hands. "How wicked we have been," she continued, "to behave so foolishly! You might have been drowned, and all we do is to laugh and be absurd—when it would have become us better to be on our knees in thankfulness!"

"Dearest one," said he, "surely it is better to be thankful with a joyful heart? I thank God! And I thank you—dear angel of sweetness and beauty! — and I rejoice! Is that wicked?"

"Oh, you must not! you must not!" she pleaded.

"But, dear one, I must say these words, because they are in me and they must come out!

I say what I mean—what I have meant for a very long time!—and what I would have said! But I was afraid of you." She peeped through her fingers in astonishment. "Yes," he continued; "I was afraid! You did not think I was afraid; but I was!—afraid of your severe calmness!—afraid of your noble beauty!—afraid of your noble character! But now I fear nothing! You have become soft and foolish!—you have kissed me!—and now I know you love me: is it not so?"

"Oh," she murmured, "I doubt I do! And now you will think lightly of me!"

"Dearest one, how you misunderstand me! You kiss me: I am filled with delight, and love, and adoration, more than ever! Why? Because I think I have the greatest treasure in the world, and I wish to keep it, and cherish it, and protect it, and hold it all for myself! And you put your hand in mine, and trust me for ever! Is it not so?"

Meg sadly and slowly shook her head.

"Not so?" said he. "Ah, yes, you say you doubt! Why doubt you, dearest one?"

"I doubt," said Meg (now recovered enough

to let her hands slip down from her face to her bosom), "because—just because you are you and I am I. It is impossible!" And she shook her head.

"I wonder," said he, once more erect, "you speak of what foolish people call our great difference of rank—the ancient, absurd, useless, and preposterous superstitions that make me Prince Hermann! Well, I am not a Socialist, and I am not a fool; but I seek to live life and find happiness in the way that is true and natural! To God, and to me, I am a man, and you, dearest one, are a woman: we love: there is no more to say: that is all!" He was prodigiously earnest—more earnest than Meg could have believed. "Now, dearest one," and he stepped forward and offered her his hand, "I will distress you no more. I have your word that you love me: it is enough: for me is the rest. I beg that you will trust me. I will not raise a finger or say a word to alarm you, or disturb. Compose yourself, dear one; they will soon arrive from the manse; and the dear white feet must be washed which you have made soiled and cold on the dirty floor."

With a shy, full look she gave him her hand, and he led her to her former seat. Then he made himself active to find a wash-basin, soap and a towel, and water. The cold water he tempered with a jugful from a cauldron of hot that hung on one side of the fire, and set the basin ready for her feet. She put them in. He knelt to wash them.

"Oh, no," said she; "I can wash them myself."

"Ah," said he, "but you will permit me? No? Well, I will not!"

She had put by his persuasion, with a subtle sense of conquest and shame intermingled. And he went and studied the catgut of the fiddle, while she washed her feet, and dried them.

"They are—I have said it—'the fair white feet of Nicolete,'" said he, as if he had eyes in the back of his head. "I have a great desire to kiss them."

"Oh, no!" she cried; "you must not!"

"Well," said he again, "I will not. But I only refrain because you wish that I should."

That he said just as a step was heard approaching the cottage. Quick as thought he

had the wash-basin, the soap, and the towel lifted to the table; and when the door was opened he was wiping his hands with the towel, and Meg seemed gazing in abstraction at the fire.

Mrs. MacPherson entered, followed by the Colonel. Colonel Herries-Hay looked pale and excited, suspicious, and out of breath.

"I fear, Colonel," said the Prince, "that my falling into the water has caused you trouble and fatigue; the walk here from the river is difficult. But you have not been burdened with your boots, as I was."

"I took them off," answered the Colonel, "and left them with your gillie to bring along." He was gazing anxiously, while he spoke, in the face of Meg, who had turned as soon as she heard his voice: he searched her face and its expression, and would have burrowed farther for a hint of anything that might have been said or done in this singular and confidential situation in which she and the Prince had been thrown together, but Meg appeared as calm and serious as was her wont: she might have had a brighter light in her eyes; but a natural touch of excite-

ment was enough to account for that. "Are you all right, Meg?" asked her father.

"Yes, I'm all right, father," she answered, calmly.

("I can see *you* are, sir," said the old soldier, aside, to the Prince.)

"I would have come out to you myself," continued Meg, "but I had no stockings nor shoes."

"Gosh be here!" exclaimed Mrs. MacPherson, "and I put out for you a pair o' hose and my best elastic-sided boots! Did ye no see them?"

"Oh, yes, I saw them, thank you, Mrs. MacPherson," answered Meg. "I couldn't very well miss them: you kindly set them ready."

"Achy!" assented Mrs. MacPherson.

"But," added Meg, "I thought I would rather wait for my own."

"Oh, just that," said Mrs. MacPherson, with a touch of sarcasm. "But maist young leddies dinna like to go bar-fit: ye seem to think naething o't! But here's your ain duds—if I'm no mista'en."

She looked out at the open door—they all

looked out—and saw the old phaeton from the manse come to a halt on the road that passed by the keeper's cottage. From it there came Mrs. Herries-Hay in stately precedence, followed by the keeper bearing two bundles, while the sheltie drooped his head and took the praiseworthy opportunity of sinking into a doze in the cool green shade made by the firs. The keeper shyly set the bundles on the table, and shyly disappeared.

“Well, Mrs. Herries-Hay,” exclaimed the Prince, in breezy greeting, “do I not look a guy? Ha, ha!”

“It is impossible, sir,” said the lady, “that you should look anything but what you are.”

“Ah, madam,” said the Prince, “that sounds of equivocation. To-day I have truly been a fool, a fish, and a grateful man: *now* which one of them do I look like? Ha, ha!”

But Mrs. Herries-Hay was not to be seduced from her sweet and placid politeness. “Whatever you may have been, or may be, sir,” said she, “your real self shines through all.”

“Well, I give it up, madam. But, whatever I am, I have to thank your adorable daughter

that I am anything but a dead body in the river!"

The Colonel said nothing, but thoughtfully tugged at his moustache. For the first time Mrs. Herries-Hay observed her daughter's bare feet.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "you are not respectable!" Meg blushed a violent colour, but said nothing, while her mother cast a side-glance at the Prince, to note how he took it. "You must put proper clothes on!"

She took one of the bundles which the keeper had carried. "That's for you, sir," said she, to the Prince, pointing to the second bundle—and hurried her daughter "ben" the cottage, whither she was shown by Mrs. MacPherson.

So the Prince and the Colonel were left to face each other. They looked each other in the eyes: both were obviously honest, both proud, both shy. The Prince wished to make a confession to the Colonel; but he remembered the difficulty created at home in Boeotia by the subject which his confession would treat of; he saw the hard, doubtful eye of the old soldier;

and, in spite of the confidence and elation evoked by his experience with Meg, he suddenly found the confession difficult to accomplish. The Colonel spoke first.

"You got a long way ahead of me with your fishing, didn't you, sir?"

"Yes," laughed the Prince, as if it were an admirable joke, "I did—didn't I? Ha! ha!"

"Did you catch anything?" asked the Colonel, still with a doubtful, troubled eye.

"Nothing, Colonel," answered the excited Prince—"not even a cold."

"But you were after a fish, I suppose, when you fell into the deep pool?" The Colonel's eye begged for information.

"Ah," said the Prince, "you have not heard how it happened! Miss Herries-Hay—so I understand—had come out to catch trout with her sister, and your servant."

"John Macaulay, I suppose?"

"That, I think I remember, is his name. Miss Herries-Hay—so I understand—wearied of the occupation, and took a walk, to look for you, I think, Colonel."

"To look for me?" observed the Colonel,

bearing on the pronoun with a doubt which he did not mean to express.

"I saw her," continued the Prince, "looking down from the high bank—*brae*, you say, I think—and I waved my hat to her and turned to come out to speak to her."

"You came out to speak to her! I see, sir," said the Colonel: "that's how it was."

The Colonel had no intention of being ironical or sarcastic: he simply wished to know; but the sound of his voice gave the Prince a certain sense of discomfort and doubt.

"Yes," said he, with a forced kind of gaiety; "and that is why I said a minute ago that I had been a fool and a fish;—because I was a fool when I fell into the water, and I was a fish when I was taken out by Miss Herries-Hay."

They might have progressed nearer to an immediate understanding had not the trout-fishing party, coming round the cottage, suddenly appeared at the open window.

"Where's Meg? Have you seen her?" demanded Mamie, looking in surprise and doubt from her father to the Prince.

"She's in there," said the Colonel, "with your mother."

"Oh, I have been so frightened!" exclaimed the girl. And then the story had to be retold.

Meanwhile Mrs. Herries-Hay had been hurrying forward the re-dressing of Meg. That astute lady perceived from her daughter's demeanour that "something had happened"—something to interest her—but she had the inestimable and rare quality of knowing when to hold her tongue and to refrain from questions. While she actively and gently helped her daughter, she said nothing but this: "What do you think, Meg? There has come an invitation to the Highland sports—the Gathering of the Clans, or whatever they call it—at Strathconacher Castle on Saturday! You would like to go, of course? I daresay the Prince, and everybody, will be there."

Meg returned no answer, though she looked at her mother as if there were a good deal in her mind that she might utter.

CHAPTER X

"TRUST ME, DADDY! TRUST ME"

THE Colonel had his way. The Prince and the Count von Saxe did not return to the manse. Of the clothing (from the Colonel's wardrobe) which Mrs. Herries-Hay had brought for the Prince's comfort, the Prince borrowed only the cap, declaring that MacPherson's "Sabbath blacks were most comfortable and distinguished": there was no need for him to change again until he could put on garments of his own.

"I suppose," said he, turning to his friend, von Saxe, "we ought to go back to the castle at once?"

"The phaeton is at your service, sir," said the Colonel, promptly, "and John Macaulay will drive you."

"But what of Mrs. Herries-Hay and the young ladies?" asked the Prince.

"Oh, walking will be best for all of us," said the Colonel, with some severity.

"Then," quoth the Prince, "walking will be best for me: I will walk."

"There is, sir," said the Colonel—and everybody felt there was more force in his words than was necessary for immediate application—"a great difference between you and us." He added, "We have but a couple of miles to walk: you, sir, would have more than seven."

"Then," persisted the Prince, "I will walk one part of the way and drive the other."

"Well," said the Colonel, sticking to his point, "if you must walk, sir, part of the way, let it be the other part;" and he smiled in self-approval. "It will save John Macaulay and the old pony the stiff brae below Ardnashiel."

"Soh!" said the Prince, with a courtly bow. He would not trust himself to say more: he was huffed and hurt, not to say angry; for it was plain that the Colonel wished to hurry him out of the company of his family.

With no more than a bow to the ladies the Prince and his friend departed, and were driven away by John Macaulay.

"Really, my dear," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, when the Prince had gone and they were all set out, "you have positively no manners! You have bitterly offended the Prince, I am sure!"

"I can't help it if I have!" answered her husband. "It had to be done! A stop had to be put to it!"

"To what?" she would have liked to ask; but she did not wish to meet her husband in open argument when he was in that temper; so she dodged. "Really," she said, "you might have asked me first if I would spare the phaeton!"

"I knew you wouldn't," said he, brusquely, "so I didn't ask. You don't walk enough; if you walked more, your health would be better and your mind clearer."

"Really, John!" she protested, with an amazed quiver of voice and person.

"Will you walk on with Mamie? I want to talk to Meg," said her husband, still in his peremptory mood—a mood which his wife always wisely allowed to have way. So Meg and her father fell behind.

Meg at that moment, calm though she seemed, was palpitating and thrilling with won-

der and joy. Something inexpressibly delightful and surpassingly beautiful had happened to her; had dissolved her whole being, and was holding it in suspense—as the world might have been held when it was “without form and void,” before the Creative Word and the Creative Hand went forth to give it shape and character. She was an amazement to herself. All she had been taught and all she had believed of Religion and Morality, of duty to God, duty to her parents, and duty to herself, was a foolish kind of nothingness compared with this that had taken hold of her, and that permeated her through and through. It was not new thought, nor new feeling, nor new imagination, but a blissful compound of all three. What she was chiefly conscious of at the moment was a tender regard for Prince Hermann’s feelings—and that because her tenderness had been acutely wounded by her father’s treatment of the Prince. As far as it is possible to say so, considering how she loved and honoured her father, her father had offended her.

On the other hand, the Colonel presumed on the fact that hitherto there had been (appar-

ently) complete confidence between him and Meg. He thought that he understood her; he believed that she was altogether like himself; but, being a simple man and a straight-forward soldier, he forgot that, even if she were made in his own image, she was a woman, and that she therefore had subtleties and involutions of feeling of which he was entirely ignorant, and which she herself, being young, could scarcely understand.

"Well, Meg," said the Colonel, putting his arm in his daughter's, when they had settled their steps to walk in company, "have you nothing to tell me?"

That was challenging confidence with too sudden and rude a shock; and Meg's sensitive consciousness shrank from it and closed upon itself. Quickly she divined that her father was in no mood to understand, if she told, what had happened and what had been said. The Prince should not be more misunderstood than he already was: moreover (she reflected with a flush of shame) how could she explain her own share in the scene?

"No, father," she answered, therefore;

"nothing." But she was frank enough to add, "Not at present."

"Oh," said he, sharp and short, in military *staccato*. He looked his disappointment: his brows gathered in a frown, and, after a quick glance at his daughter, he bent his gaze on the ground. "'Not at present'"—he repeated her words. "Does that mean that you may presently?"

"Oh, father, how can I say?" she exclaimed. Then she pleaded, "You shouldn't press me: it's not fair."

"Very well," said her father—and his arm lay linked with hers so lightly that a hint would have withdrawn it—"I won't press you. But it looks to me more suspicious than ever if he has made no use of the opportunity he had."

"Opportunity for what, father?" asked Meg, with some heat.

"For declaring himself—at least."

"Why are you so suspicious of him, father?—so hard upon him? What has he done wrong? And I'm sure a minute or two ago you were quite rude to him: you positively drove him away."

"You think I was rude?" said the Colonel, humbly. "Well, Meg, if I was, it was for your sake."

"For *my* sake?" She turned to him as if she could not have heard aright. "Rude!—for me!—father?"

"Well, well, my dear," said her father, "I doubt I have been mistaken—mistaken in you, I mean, Meg. I thought you were serious and reasonable; but now—I *ha'e my doots*, as John Macaulay would say." And he smiled a grim smile. "I'm afraid you have as much romantic moonshine about you as other women. I dare say I have been an old fool to expect you to be different. But I did think, Meg, that you would be different in this, at any rate—that you would have no secrets from your father."

Her father's reproach moved her. She pressed his arm affectionately with hers: she had a mind to let confession flow; but when she recalled what confession would mean—how could she? Oh, how could she? "Don't, father!" she murmured, as if he were hurting her. "If I——" she broke off with, "I can't say anything at present."

"I know, I know," said he. "That's just it. And I won't press you. I only find it necessary to speak more plainly than I had intended. Look here, Meg. You must try to understand me without my being too plain. I may not know women, and girls—hanged if I believe I do!—but I am pretty solidly sure I know men, and young men, too; and there's rhyme for you, if not reason." He tried to carry the business off lightly; though it was plain his heart was anything but light. "Prince Hermann is a young man, and—what is worse—the probable heir to the kingdom of Boeotia; and he has been philandering after you for some time."

"Oh, father!—philandering!"

"That's just how your mother would say it! Well, really, I didn't think you had so much as that of your mother in you! But I won't quarrel with you about the word, Meg. I'll allow you any word you like, if you allow me the fact. He knows—he must know—that marriage with you is impossible, utterly impossible. You see that, don't you?"

"Please, father, don't ask me any questions, but go on with what you want to say."

"It is impossible," he went on, desperately, "whether you, or your mother, or anybody else, believes it or not! Besides, he is engaged, I believe, to the Princess Ernestine of Starkenburg-Kriegspiel."

"That was broken off, father, before we left Boeotia."

"It was, was it? Well, I had forgotten. At any rate he can only mean one or other of two things. The one I reject," said the Colonel, loftily, and with some heat, "as unworthy of him, and dishonourable to me and you; and the other is almost equally dishonourable to an English view. I mean a morganatic marriage, which in this country is counted about as bad as no marriage at all. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, father."

He had expected some kind of argument. Her prompt and clear acceptance of his statements made him feel at an end, as a man may when, after valorously squaring up to someone in the dark, he finds that his opponent is a peaceful-minded friend. "Well, Meg," said he, feebly, "there you are." Then a gush of friendliness and parental tenderness came over him.

"Meg, my dear," said he—and his tough old arm trembled in hers—"I trust you. I beg to assure you I do. But I know—I know—in youth the blood is hot and, as the good and noble Shakespeare says, it does not wait upon the judgment! I will say no more! but this, Meg, this! Our name—my name—has never had a stain of dishonour upon it, and I will not believe my Meg is the one to stain it!"

Meg was too moved to say much. She pressed his arm close to her and faltered, "Trust me, daddy! trust me!" And that was all.

"My dear, beautiful, unfortunate Meg!" murmured he.

"Hush, you silly daddy!" said she. And the painful episode was at an end.

It was not many seconds before the acute-eared and active-minded Mrs. Herries-Hay somehow understood that the interview was over. "Well, now," said she, halting and turning, "is your confab with Meg finished, John? If it is, let us all walk together."

"By all means, Maggie," said the Colonel, once more at tolerable peace with the world, "let us all walk together in unity and concord."

"To that," said Meg, with a laugh, "Mrs. MacPherson would have said '*Imphm!*'"

Thus they tramped home the rest of the way in great good-humour, sniffing at intervals the pungent, resinous odour of the air among the firs, stopped now and then by the rustle of a stoat or a rabbit and the sporting instinct, and all the while accompanied by the sound of the rushing Conacher Water. It was as soon as they had got indoors that Mrs. Herries-Hay broke forth, unable longer to restrain her curiosity. She came to Meg's room when she was taking her things off.

"Well," said she, "and what did he say to you?"

Meg looked merely a beautiful wooden image of surprise. "What did who say?"

"You are either a fool, Meg," said her mother, smoking with suppressed anger and disappointment, "or you are closer and cleverer than I took you for!" And she flounced off.

Her mother had barely gone when the door was opened softly, and Mamie slipped in, closing the door and setting her back to it.

"Oh, what a lucky girl you are, Meg!" she

exclaimed. "The things that happen to you! And you don't seem to care twopence! If I had got wet up to the middle, fishing him out—oh, my! But no! There you are as quiet as a cat, and as right as ninepence! Oh, Meg, you *are* a fraud! And you *are* a great cat! Now, do tell me—I'm dying to know—did he kiss you?"

"Mamie!"

"Well, did you kiss him?"

"You are too scandalous and absurd, Mamie!" declared her sister.

"I don't see any harm in kissing—just in a friendly sort of way—when you had both been nearly drowned. It seems to me just a prettier, pleasanter way of saying 'How-de-do? Glad to see you'!"

"I don't *believe* in kissing—in a *friendly* sort of way!" declared her elder, with force and solemnity, and turned her back upon her.

CHAPTER XI

"I'D CROWNS RESIGN"

It was impossible for Prince Hermann to be ill-tempered for long; and he could not bear any man a grudge for a whole day together. His feeling of huff, therefore, had disappeared before he and von Saxe and the gillie, driven by John Macaulay, had reached the bridge over the Conacher. There he jumped out, and sent John Macaulay home with the phaeton, a handsome fee, and the Colonel's fishing-boots, which had been in the charge of the gillie; and he and von Saxe set off footing it briskly and blithely up the fir-clad hill together. The Prince alternately hummed deep in his throat, or shrilly whistled his favourite refrain of those days, and von Saxe wore a fixed smile because of some agreeable thoughts of his own.

"Willy," exclaimed the Prince, suddenly,

"this is a delightful country! I should like to live here always! Would not you?"

"It has its attractions, sir," answered von Saxe, "and its disappointments. Its beasts and its fish are not so glorious in the way of sport, but its maidens are!"

"Willy, I will fish no more!"

"Had enough of it, sir?" said von Saxe, with an eye and a tone of curiosity.

"Well, I have lost my rod and my hat, and I have been nearly drowned: is not that enough of it?" Then he exclaimed suddenly, "But, *mein Gott in Himmel!* what delightful pleasures they are to be alive and to be in love! Do you not think so, Willy?"

"I doubt, sir," said Willy, with a distinctly worldly smile, "whether I have had the same opportunities of judging of these pleasures."

"You are not in love, then?" asked the Prince.

"With whom, sir?"

"Ah, if you must ask 'With whom?' then you are not. When you are in love there can be but one."

"For the time being, sir," said von Saxe,

smiling again. "I have a distinct recollection of your having been in love before, sir, and with—well, someone else."

The Prince looked thoughtful an instant, and then said, "The love of the calf and of the ape, Willy!—vices of the blood and of youth!"

"Are you much older, sir, than you were a year ago?" asked von Saxe.

"When was that, Willy?"

"When you were *épris* with Fraülein Karoline Haas of the Theatre."

"*Gott in Himmel*, Willy! that was not a year ago! That was in another existence! I am altogether another person now!—Ha! ha! Now tell me, Willy: you are ten years older—ten, is it?—than I am, and you have seen much of this country: which do you prefer, the English girls or the Scottish?"

"I prefer them both, sir, at different times."

"Ah, but answer me without equivocation. If you must choose, which would you prefer?"

"Well, sir," said von Saxe, slowly, letting his eye frequently refer to the Prince's face, "if I must choose, I should prefer a mixture of Eng-

lish and Scottish. The English part would give a charming seriousness and a bewitching modesty, and the Scottish would give an *élan*—what they call in England ‘dash’ and ‘go’—which would be positively enthralling.”

“You are right, Willy! That is she! Her mother is English; her father is Scottish: she has seriousness, she has modesty: you have seen them; but you have never seen her *élan*, her ‘go.’ It would—it would, indeed—smite you with surprise and more admiration.”

“Ah!” said von Saxe, all attention.

“No,” said the Prince, “that is not for your ear: it is too precious. And I must respect my future wife, Willy.”

“Ah, you are truly serious, then?” said von Saxe.

“Willy, I adore her! I can think of no other!”

“That should be evidence, certainly,” said von Saxe drily.

“She is the handsomest, best, bravest girl I have ever known, and, what is more, she can be a comrade!—a comrade, truly!” he insisted, because von Saxe looked a trifle incredulous.

"And you wish to marry her, sir," said von Saxe—"morganatically, of course?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the Prince, gazing at his companion an instant and then up the hill.

"You will find it difficult, sir," said von Saxe, shaking his head. "There will be your father, the king, to deal with—and deal with through the Cancellarius—and there will be the Colonel, also; and he will not be easy to prevail on. The English, sir, do not have morganatic marriage; they do not like morganatic marriage; they like morganatic marriage as little as—no marriage at all."

"Soh. It is true, I suppose. But I have not used the word 'morganatic.'"

"Heavens, sir!" exclaimed von Saxe, truly astonished.

"Bah!" quoth the Prince, "you are dull, von Saxe. What is the song I have had in my mind and in my throat all these days?"

When they arrived at the castle, the Prince changed the grotesque Sabbath raiment of MacPherson for some of his own, and sat down with von Saxe to a hurried and preoccupied morsel of lunch.

"Where is the Herr Cancellarius?" the Prince, anon, asked of the German servant who waited on him.

"The Herr Cancellarius, your Royal Highness," said the man, "is in the library, where he always is now."

"Studying his Sir Walter Scott, I suppose," said the Prince to von Saxe: "he has the monomania of Sir Walter." He turned to the servant. "My compliments to the Herr Cancellarius, and I will come to the library in a few minutes to have a word with him."

"Permit me, sir, to rise," said von Saxe, an instant thereafter.

"Don't go, Willy," said the Prince; "I wish you to be with me when I speak to the Cancellarius."

"Grant me a minute, sir," said von Saxe; "I will return and go with you."

Once out of the Prince's presence he sped to the library. There he found the Cancellarius surrounded by the works of Sir Walter Scott, and at the moment sunk deep in the romantic delights of Rob Roy.

"Hist, Cancellarius!" said von Saxe, in a

hurry, "the Prince is coming to talk to you. He is given over utterly to the charms of *la Herries-Hay*! He has *la tête montée*! He will need careful management. Hush!" And with that he was gone.

He returned to the Prince, and in his company he returned again, with an aspect of ingenuousness and ignorance, to the library and the presence of the Herr Cancellarius. The Cancellarius rose, and the high lights in the Gothic chamber made his white head seem more fluffy and foolish than ever. To gain time to consider his position in the crisis of which von Saxe had given him notice, the Cancellarius first drew the Prince's attention to one or two letters that had arrived in his absence. While the Prince was opening these the old man alternately considered his face and his own well-kept nails.

"Ah," exclaimed the Prince, "here is an invitation to go to Strathconacher Castle on Friday, to witness Highland sports! Shall we go, Cancellarius? The sports should be of interest to you—you who have the enthusiasm for Sir Walter and all things Scottish! And, I

dare say, everybody will be there. I think we must go."

"Yes; that is so, your Royal Highness," said the Cancellarius, with immediate interest. "It will be something of splendid memory for the future to see the wild and warlike clans of the Highlands assembled together in sportive emulation."

The Prince let the sentence pass: his attention was bent to another issue of the meeting. "And," said he, "it is certain that the noble families from all around will be there. Yes, we will go. *Apropos*, Cancellarius, there is a little piece of business which I desire should find itself arranged before that time." And he faced frankly about upon the old man.

"Soh, your Royal Highness," said the Cancellarius. "You desire money, perchance?" And he nervously set to moving things about on the table as if he were in search of a cheque-book or a careless bundle of bank notes.

"No, Cancellarius," said the Prince, "nor what money can buy. Honoured Herr Cancellarius," continued he, bringing his feet together and making a slight bow of affability, "you are

my father's representative—you are in his august place to me for the present, and therefore I beg to inform you that I am about to ask a young lady to be my wife."

"Soh, your Royal Highness!" said the Cancellarius, bowing with his hands clasped before him.

"And now," said the Prince, "having formally made you the announcement, let us sit down in friendly comfort." They sat down, and the Prince looked at his watch. "There is plenty of time," said he; "we can easily go there and back before it is dark. You will come with me—will you not?—to visit her parents in my father's name."

"Who is the privileged young lady, your Royal Highness, and who are her well-born parents?" asked the Cancellarius, in a tone devoid of surprise, or temper, or committal of any kind.

"Ah," said the Prince, "have I not said? She is the elder of the two daughters of the Herr Colonel Herries-Hay."

"Soh!" said the Cancellarius, permitting himself to manifest a little concern. "If I do not mistake, your Royal Highness, she is the

same young lady as your royal father, the king, was not pleased with when her father was accredited to our Court of Boeotia?"

"That is so, Cancellarius: she is the same."

"It is exceedingly unfortunate, sir," said the Cancellarius, "that she should have come in your way again, in this country."

"There we differ, Cancellarius. I call it exceedingly fortunate. But it is the small difference of a small syllable. *Ha! ha!* But at any rate you will go with me."

The Cancellarius surveyed thoughtfully his soft, pink palms. "It will be a very difficult thing to arrange a marriage morganatic in this country. Do you not think so, von Saxe? You know this country."

"It will not only be difficult," said the Count; "it will be impossible."

"I recognise the impossibility," said the Prince. "I bow to it and pass it by: I will not attempt it."

"Ah, then, your Royal Highness," said the Cancellarius, with an easy relaxation of smile, "you cannot mean *wife*."

"You mistake me, Herr Cancellarius," said

the Prince: "I can, and do mean *wife—wife* truly and honourably, even in the English fashion."

"Your Royal Highness," said the Cancellarius, in obvious surprise and extremity, "you must know that that is impossible!—impossible utterly!"

"Herr Cancellarius," said the Prince, with unusual seriousness, "you seem to imagine that I am altogether thoughtless, that I have not considered the matter fully. I beg to assure you that I have. I know perfectly that while the arrangement of Society continues as it is at present, I cannot raise an untitled lady to my rank; but, Cancellarius, even with Society as it is, I can descend to her rank."

The Cancellarius was manifestly distressed beyond measure. He spread forth his palms. "You would resign your royal rank, sir—your probable succession to the crown of Boeotia—all for the sake of a beautiful maiden? You can find, sir, tens of thousands of maidens in the world to love, but you can have but one crown!"

"Herr Cancellarius," said the Prince, "I

perceive that I am still to you the foolish boy that had a heart fluttered by every petticoat. I am not. I have discovered that there is for me only one woman in the world, and for her I would give up the biggest crown in the world."

"Forgive me, your Royal Highness," said the Cancellarius, with greater show of sincerity, "but have you no ambition?—have you no pride in the hope, the possibility, of being king of one of the oldest kingdoms of Europe?"

"Cancellarius," said the Prince, "I cannot discover that any man has more than one life, and whether he be king or peasant he had better make the most and the happiest of it. Now, if I gave up my life and my prospect of happiness to an absurd figment and superstition, I should think myself a fool. It is an absurd figment to call Boeotia a kingdom at all: it is now part of the German Empire, and the Kaiser will see that it remains so. Its court, therefore, and its king are ridiculous survivals: they are of no use: they are but a dead burden on the people. I would give up any crown without regret; but our own crown!—its meaning is gone: it is but

a piece of metal set with stones—and I toss it away with a light heart."

Both the Cancellarius and the Count were so shocked that for an instant nothing was said.

"I did not know you were a Socialist, sir!" said von Saxe, drily.

"Nor am I, Willy."

"I beg, sir," said the Cancellarius, whose sense of decorum was terribly shocked, whose world seemed tottering to ruin, "that you will not repeat these disastrous revolutionary opinions in any public way."

"Do not fear, Cancellarius. I am not a reformer, nor a politician at all. And now that I have explained my intention, you will come with me to Colonel Herries-Hay, will you not?"

"Your Royal Highness, I regret to inform you," said the Cancellarius, as if he would draw closer about him the dignity of which the Prince had (he thought) as good as threatened to deprive him, "that I can do nothing—and I beg you will do nothing—till I communicate with the king, your father."

"Can you not," said the Prince, with a frown of impatience and disappointment, "go with me to the Colonel and write to my father afterwards?"

"That, sir," said the Cancellarius, "would be such a gross breach of duty as I cannot allow to myself."

"Then, Herr Cancellarius, you must telegraph," said the Prince, rising.

"The telegraph, sir, is public, and it makes mistakes."

"You have your private cipher, Cancellarius."

"Is it possible to make by the telegraph so long a statement as will be necessary? I think not possible."

"Then, Cancellarius," said the Prince, resolutely, "if you do not telegraph to my father, I shall myself."

"Forgive me, sir," put in von Saxe, "but do you guess what would be the effect of that? The king would be so angry he would demand that all the machinery of the British Court and Government should be set in motion to send you back to Boeotia at once.

Better, sir, let the Herr Cancellarius manage it."

"That is so, your Royal Highness," said the Chancellor: "leave it in my hands, and to please you, I shall telegraph."

CHAPTER XII

THE MEETING IN THE WOOD

THE Herr Cancellarius had an excellent opinion of himself as a person skilled in diplomacy and the craft of courts. The Prince having gone off stung with disappointment that his formal visit to Colonel Herries-Hay must be postponed, the Chancellor sat a little while, with his fingers in his white, fluffy beard, and revolved a diplomatic scheme for the prompt settlement of the crisis which had arisen. While he sat, he could hear and note with the surface of his attention that the Prince had recovered his spirits: he was joyously ramping through the halls and corridors of the castle, slamming doors, humming catches of music, and roaring scraps of love-songs.

"He is a whirlwind! He is a tornado! He is a mountain storm! *Mein Gott!*" exclaimed the Chancellor, in his own ear, rubbing his hands

together, "it must be contrived without his father."

If he telegraphed a summary of the difficulty to the king, the Cancellarius knew that, for reply, he would receive, in all likelihood, an angry summons home to Boeotia, where the Prince might be shut up and he himself be disgraced for failure in the purpose for which he had accompanied the Prince to Britain. Why, then, should he trouble His Majesty of Boeotia with this very matter which had been confided to him? Soh! He would triumphantly accomplish it! Alone he would do it, and thus he would gain, when it was known, greater credit with his master the king! And he would telegraph also; oh, yes, he would telegraph! Soh! He would make appeal—with a statement in summary of the difficulty—to Her Majesty of England; he would beg her to remove the obnoxious Herries-Hays from the neighbourhood, and, if possible, from the country! Having arrived at that decision with some excitement, the fluffy-headed Cancellarius set himself to carry it out. He drew up to the table, found a sheaf of telegraph forms, and proceeded to write carefully

a telegram. But he had barely begun when he jumped up and rang the bell.

"Tell them," said he, to the servant who appeared, "to prepare some carriage—any carriage—to bear me to the bureau of the telegraph."

Again he sat down to write his telegram. He wrote in cipher, and he did not address the Queen—because it was not in strict diplomatic etiquette for him to communicate direct with Her Majesty of Great Britain and Ireland. He telegraphed therefore to the Boeotian Ambassador in London; and, since the history of his communication is somewhat outside the interest of this story, let it be summarised here and dismissed. On receipt of the urgent telegram from the Cancellarius, the Boeotian Ambassador called upon the English Foreign Minister; and the English Foreign Minister declared instantly that, owing to the doctrine of freedom of the British subject and so forth, the obnoxious Herries-Hays could not be moved forcibly one inch from where they were; but he promised to communicate concerning the difficulty with Her Majesty the Queen. And the Boeotian Amba-

sador telegraphed back to that effect to the Herr Cancellarius.

But all that took some considerable time—considerable, seeing that the telegraph was concerned. It was three o'clock when the Cancellarius drove to the post office: it was half-past nine when a messenger trudged up the avenue to Ardnashiel Castle with the Ambassador's reply.

Meanwhile Prince Hermann had been agreeably occupied. After rioting through the castle for a little while—raising what von Saxe called "*Inferno et Tommaso*": thus by a foreign wrappage concealing a vulgarism of English speech—he proposed to von Saxe that they should take a ride to soothe their restlessness.

"*Your* restlessness, sir," said von Saxe, with his flickering smile.

"That is so: my restlessness. Your adorable horsemanship, Willy, will soothe my restlessness. *Ha! ha!*"

"Where shall we ride, sir?" asked von Saxe, with an eye of scrutiny on the Prince.

"Let us ride forward, Willy!—ever forward!"

"But we must return, sir," said Willy.

"Yes, we must return. It is true we must return," said the Prince.

And with that apparent vagueness of intention they rode forth. Von Saxe confessed no surprise when the Prince took the road to the bridge over the Conacher, and no surprise when he crossed the bridge and turned up the road that led past the parish kirk and the minister's manse! When, however, they had continued along that way for more than a mile he ventured a question.

"Is it your intention, sir," he said, "to call at the manse? I would remind you, sir, that the Herr Colonel was not profuse in cordiality when you last parted from him."

"No, Willy," said the Prince, with a quick flush and a frown at the recollection, "we will not trouble the Herr Colonel. We will ride past and return the other way."

They had ridden very little further when they spied a girl plucking wild flowers by the wayside. A dark and ancient fir-wood marched right down to the edge of the road, and against its sombre depth, its airy and pillared gloom, the

girl's white figure, with a speck of blue at the back, stood clearly forth. As they neared her, a dog shot out at them—a bounding mass of insistent, furious barking and undulating hair. He was to be recognised as the black and yellow collie that was attendant on the manse. The horses shied, and plunged, and snorted, and the girl standing up was seen to be Mamie. She called in the dog with a shrill voice of authority, and the Prince and his companion drew up.

“You gather flowers,” queried the Prince, “with only the dog to help you?” And his eye roved around to discover the presence of any other.

“Oh, no, Prince,” said she, promptly; “there's more than the dog with me. Meg's round the edge of the wood there, picking blackberries.”

“Is that so?” asked the Prince; he hesitated; he patted his horse's neck; he looked carefully at Mamie and carefully at von Saxe.

Von Saxe apprehended his Prince's desire, and being a complete courtier, his impulse was to aid its gratification. “Will your dog eat us

up," said he, to Mamie, "if the Prince and I get off our horses to help to make a bouquet?"

"Ah, no," said she; "I will not let him. Besides," she added, "he objects only to creatures on four legs, or more than four."

"More than four?" queried von Saxe, when he had swung to the ground (the Prince doing likewise).

"Yes; I was thinking of black-beetles," answered Mamie. "He hates them; and," she continued, looking reflectively at the dog, who listened with his tongue hanging and his brush wagging, "I think he is afraid of them."

"Afraid of black-beetles!" said the Prince—"a dog! *Ha! ha!* That is droll."

"Well, Prince," said Mamie, seriously, "a black-beetle ran at him the other day in the kitchen, and he fled howling."

"*Ha! ha!*" laughed the Prince; and "*Ho! ho!*" laughed the Count.

But Mamie was not letting her wits wander, though she might seem to be doing so: she was quite alive to the necessity and opportunity of the occasion. She glanced from the Prince to von Saxe (while von Saxe held the bridles

of both horses), and she spoke with her precise little air of conviction and decision. "But," said she, "there aren't flowers enough for us all to gather; and I couldn't carry them all if there were. One to help me would be quite enough."

"Then," said von Saxe, "I had better be that one."

"There's Meg," suggested Mamie, doubtfully; "she needs help more than I do: picking blackberries."

"Ah, that is so!" broke in the Prince. "Von Saxe, then, will help you, and I will help your sister."

"Blackberries are very prickly," said Mamie, slyly.

"Soh!" said the Prince. "Ha! ha! I like to prickle my fingers!"

Instead of going "round the edge," the Prince crossed the corner of the wood, to reach more quickly the place indicated by Mamie. It was impressively gloomy and refreshingly pungent among the tall, pillared stems of the pines, and he had passed for some distance out of hearing of Mamie and von Saxe before the side-limit of the wood appeared. And before he reached

it he heard voices. His footsteps were hushed in the spongy depths of pine-needles and decaying cones and twigs, so that his approach did not disturb the speakers. As he marched nearer, he recognised, with a pang of disappointment and jealousy, the voice of Meg. With whom was she conversing? It was a man's voice that answered hers; and yet, surely, it was not her father's! He was irresistibly drawn nearer; and he saw, and smiled (himself remaining unseen), that Meg was sitting on the margin of the wood looking forth into the sunlight, while she talked with old John Macaulay, who stood a yard or two off, shaping a stick.

"Oh," the Prince heard Meg say, "I didn't know you had ever been married, John."

"Na, mem," answered John Macaulay, "I never was just a'thegither what ye might ca' married; but I was near hand, mem."

"I don't understand, John," said Meg. "Near-hand? Do you mean that you have been best man to some bridegroom?"

"Ay, mem," answered John, "I have been that oftener than aince; but that's not what I will be meaning."

"I suppose you mean, then," said Meg, "that some girl jilted you—promised to marry you and didn't?"

"Imphm!" was John's answer. "She would be as bonnie as yoursel', mem, all but the speaking; and she was no that ill at that neither."

"Were you—were you very fond of her, John?" asked Meg, with acute interest.

"Imphm," answered John, with meditation, "I was that. Ay, mem, I thought a gey hantle o' her, and I will be aye giving her bits o' things in presents, and I courted her at night."

"Why at night?" asked Meg.

"Gosh be here, mem!" said John, "folk will never like to be seen at that job!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Meg, set back with surprise.

"Ay," continued John, "and ae night—I mind it weel—we was standing in the lee o' the peat-stack; and she opened out her whole he'rt to me!"

"What did she say?" asked Meg, on the impulse of curiosity. Then she exclaimed, "I

beg your pardon, John! That's not a question I should ask!"

"No matter for that, mem," said John, politely. "But I canna just a'thegither ca' to mind what she said. But," he exclaimed, wagging his head, and letting his voice ring with feeling, "I thought her a rale, noble wumman! And I speired at her if she would marry me; and she said, 'Ay; fine that!'"

He made a long pause. Meg asked, "Well, John, and why didn't she marry you?"

"I fand her cheek by jowl wi' the carter the next night. That was a'."

"Then," exclaimed Meg, "it was you jilted her!—not she you!"

"Ay, just that," answered John. "It cam' to the same thing: we wasna married."

John Macaulay walked away. The Prince stood still and waited. Meg sat still and looked after John. When he was a little way off, she laughed to herself, and repeated his last words—"It cam' to the same thing: we wasna married;" and then she rose, with a small basket in her hand, and with the evident intention on her face of walking off to pick blackberries.

"Meg!" said the Prince, and stepped forth. She halted and stood in amazement. He stepped nearer, saying, "May I say it?—'I thought her a real, noble woman!'"

"You heard it, then?" said Meg.

"Yes; I heard it," said he.

"All of it?"

"That I cannot say. But I heard."

"But," she suddenly demanded, as if just awakened to the impropriety of his presence, "what are you doing here?"

"I have come," he answered, "to help you to pick blackberries."

"Oh, no," said she; "you mustn't!"

"But I must! If you prickle your dear fingers, I must also!"

"Prickle your dear fingers?" she asked, with a smile.

"Is that so?" he cried, with light in his eyes. He tried to take her hand, but she swiftly put it behind her.

"Ah, no, sir!" she said; "you must not!"

"Ah," he murmured, in reproach. "'Sir!' Why, 'sir'? Am I not to you just a man? Have I not said it?"

She shook her head sadly. "No saying it can make it so. I will use John Macaulay's words: 'I think a gey hantle of you;' but I must say 'sir,' and that's just where it is. It will not do, sir."

"But, *mein Gott!*" he exclaimed, "I thought you love me!"

"I think a gey hantle of you, sir," she repeated, with a smile, and a shy look that thrilled him, like a shaft of sunlight in a chilly atmosphere. "But we were both foolish this morning; and—and we must think no more of it. Good-bye."

She held out her hand, but he refused to take it. "But, *mein Gott in Himmel!*" he cried, "I was not foolish: I was wise and serious."

"And now," said she, "it is my turn to be serious and wise."

"Ah," said he, "you are changed: you have talked. Now let us talk, and understand, please; and let us walk in the dark wood, for my heart is now dark."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THEY REASONED IN THE WOOD

SHE hesitated a moment, and then she turned with him into the stillness and gloom of the wood, saying, "Yes, it will be best, perhaps, to have a complete understanding." She said that with great show of resolution, swinging her empty basket the while.

"Ah, dearest one," he broke out, "why so cold to me?" He tried to take her disengaged hand to place within his arm.

"Ah, no, no!" said she, escaping from him. "We must keep this basket between us if we are to talk reasonably." And she shifted the empty little basket to the hand next him.

"But," said he, "I have not promised to talk reasonably."

"But, sir," said Meg, "we *must* talk reasonably. Please," she added, in a pleading note.

"Sir?" Why will you continue to say

‘sir’?” he cried, pettishly stamping his foot, which fell soundless in the decay of the wood.

“Because, sir”—she repeated the word, with a glance at him which hovered in meaning between serious insistence and mischievous doubt how he might take it—“I wish to keep before myself the difference between us, which we cannot remove whatever we say.”

“But what you call the difference—what seems the difference,” said he, with a wave of the hand to dismiss it—“I can remove it, and I will! So what is there of more to say?”

“A great deal, sir.” With her eyes removed from him, she resolutely held on to her use of the detested word. He took it so quietly that she stole a glance at him. He looked so pained and downcast that she impulsively exclaimed, “I won’t say it again. But I will tell you all I mean by it.”

“Soh! Tell me then,” said he, sadly; and the sadder he appeared to grow, the more earnestly and the more passionately did she urge her plea of mutual abnegation—all the more passionately that she only half believed in it herself.

“I mean that we are really very far apart,

and that it is impossible—quite, quite impossible!—for us to be any nearer,” said Meg.

“All that there is,” said he, “is no more than that little basket; and it can be put away as easily. Believe me.”

“Ah, no, no!” she cried; “you must keep as you are, and I must keep as I am! Never, never can I be anything but Margaret Herries-Hay! You cannot make me anything else, whatever you do! And, even if you could, I could not permit you! Do!—do think what you are! You are a Prince!—the son of a king! And one day you may be king yourself! Think of that!”

“Well, yes, I think of it. But it is nothing.”

“What?” she said. “Nothing to have the hope of so splendid, so glorious a position? Nothing to have the prospect of being a king? There are not many kings or queens in the world!”

“And there will be less many soon: they die out, like the Dodo and the Great Auk. They will be better dead: they will then rest in peace.”

“You must not talk like that,” said she.

Her attention was too much taken up with what she wished to say herself to be ready to catch his meaning completely: she thought his words were boyish frivolity. "One king dies, but another succeeds him," she continued. "I should like to see you a king—commanding soldiers, and generals as if they were soldiers, and doing wise things to make your country happy and prosperous, and receiving the cheers of all the crowds in the streets!"

"*Ha! ha!*" laughed the Prince. "Like the Kaiser or the Tsar!" His laugh sounded at first of his usual cheery note, but it died down on something harsh and sardonic, which startled Meg.

"And why not?" she asked; but the passionate tone was somewhat restrained by a new timidity—a doubt that she might be venturing out of her depth in these strange waters. "Why should you not be as beautiful and great as the Kaiser or the Tsar?—more beautiful and glorious than they are, and far, far better to your poor people?"

"*Ha! ha!*" he laughed again, but with more good humour. "Dearest one, there is

not room in Europe for more than one Kaiser and one Tsar; and there is not much room for them. Permit me one more word," he said, holding up a hand to beg her to defer some further observation she was prepared with. "Do you think me a noisy, jolly, foolish boy, and no more? Some do; but I hoped you did not."

"Oh, no, no! I do not!" she protested. "Believe me, I do not! And I am very, very sorry if I have made you think I do!"

"Well," said he, "I am not. I am a philosopher. Now about this matter of Kaiser and Tsar—I do think you do not understand that the poor little kingdom of Boeotia would be broken to pieces if its king tried to make himself a great person like the Kaiser, the King of Prussia. It would be like the thing your viceroy in India once did say to the Ameer of Afghanistan: it would be the collision on the stream of the earthen pipkin with the iron pot: there would be an end, not of Boeotia, but of its kingdom. And a jolly good thing, too, as the Englishman would say."

"Perhaps," said Meg, "I do not know anything about it. I suppose I do not. But, oh,

if I were a king, I should try to be a great king!—great and good!—like our King Arthur or King Alfred!”

“It is not possible!—it is not possible!” he protested—“in the modern time!”

“Not possible to be good and great?” she said, passionately. “Surely that is always possible! Do not say that it is not!”

“Not good and great as a king!” he insisted. “As a man, yes; but not as a king!”

“Ah,” she cried, “I do not know what to say to you! I dare say I do not understand! But I wish to plead with you to think no more of poor me! I am nobody, and you are a Prince; and you ought to think seriously of your duty to your father, and your duty to your country!—your duty to God, who has put you in the way of being a king, and your duty to the people you must govern wisely and well! Think of them!—think of them all!—and forget me! Go home,” she continued, in a rush of protest and passion—“go home to Boeotia as soon as you can, and prepare to be a great king! Oh, do!—do!”

“Well,” said he, quietly and sadly, “you do

not, or will not, understand. But I must say one—two more words. God has nothing at all to do with it; therefore, duty to God has nothing at all to do with it. Next, the people: the people do not wish for us, and they do not need us: they prefer Herren Bebel and Liebknecht and the other Socialists. And never will I push myself," said he, with acute point, "among those who do not wish me."

"Oh, but!—but," she cried, at her wits' end, "have you really no ambition?—none at all?"

"I have had the ambition," he answered, "to be your husband."

"Oh, but that is nothing!—that is not a career!"

"It would be the beginning of a career."

"But," she cried, again evading him, "will not the Socialists ruin the people? My father always says they will, and be more dreadful tyrants than kings ever were."

"It may be so," said he, carelessly. "But if the people prefer them—yes, the people must go to the devil their own way."

"Oh," cried she, seeing a beautiful point to

make, "but how noble if you could step in and save them from that!"

"I will not," said he. "I am proud. I will not compete with the Herren Bebel and Liebknecht for the suffrages of the foolish people."

"Oh, what can I say?" complained Meg. "What more reasons can I give? I had no idea," she broke out, "that you were so obstinate in—in your opinions!"

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "Yes; I am obstinate."

"If you would only understand!" she pled.

"I do understand now," he said, sadly and coldly. "I thought you loved me: now I understand you do not!"

"Oh!" she moaned, as if in a pang of pain.

"But let me say this last thing: You have seen the wax kings in Madame Tussaud's in London? Well, a king of Boeotia has no more opportunity of ambition than a wax king. I do not wish to be a wax king: I did wish to be a man. You forbid me, and——"

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, "I do not forbid you!"

"But you do not love me!"

"I have not said so!—I have not!" she cried. Then, when he faced about upon her in a blaze of awakened hope, she clasped her hands—basket and all—before her, and moaned, "Oh, what have I said? There are so many things to think of! There is my father: you say you are proud; but he is proud, too! Oh, yes," she cried, breaking off and putting her hand to her cheek, "there are so many things! But I am determined!—firmly, firmly determined!—that you must not wreck your life on my account! I would far, far rather die than you should do that! But, when you say that in any case you do not wish to be a king—oh, I do not know what to say! Only you ought to understand that, if I wish you to be great and good and wise, it is just because——"

"Because you love me?" he exclaimed, in triumph.

"Yes! yes!" she answered, looking at him gloriously, and then perforce looking away, because of the light that shone on his face, "I love you, dear Prince!—I love you! But that can make no difference! There is my father!—there is everything!—to think of!"

"Now I am happy!" said he, seizing perforce her two hands. "And I love you, dearest one, more than ever for the very bad reasons you have brought forth why I should not love you!"

"Were they *very* bad reasons?" she asked, wistfully.

"Oh, but!—execrable reasons!"

"I suppose," she cried, "my heart wasn't in them."

Suddenly he folded her to his breast, and for a breathing space or two there was no sound but the stealthy dropping all around them of the pine-needles.

"Have no fear, dearest one!" said he, at length. "Rest in peace and love. I will arrange all things with your father!"

They moved on arm in arm; and the open sunshine beyond the wood shone before them.

When they issued from the wood they discovered they were on that same side of it as they had started from: they had walked in a constant curve, while thinking they were keeping a straight line.

"Ah," said the Prince, "that is so always

when you know not the way. And we curved to the left because there is the heart, and the heart was heavy."

They then turned the corner of the wood, and came upon Mamie and von Saxe sitting in converse.

"What!" exclaimed Mamie, her eye lighting at once on the empty basket; "not picked any blackberries?"

"No," answered the Prince; "we did not see any."

"Oh!" cried Mamie, "you must have been blind! I saw bushels an hour ago!"

CHAPTER XIV

"THE WHITE OWL"

AFTER dinner at Ardnashiel Castle—which was late, because of the late return of the Prince and his friend von Saxe—the Prince marched out upon the terrace, gaily humming, and biting the end of a cigar. He was followed by the Count von Saxe and another gentleman of his suite. He paused before lighting his cigar, and looked up and down the Strath, which was beginning to darken over the water: it was that singularly clear and witching hour which is called in the north "'twixt the gloaming and the mirk."

"It is very beautiful!" exclaimed the Prince.
"Decidedly it is a lovely land!—a lovely land!"

Afar in the west the peaceful clouds shone with purple and gold—like "Islands of the Blest"—in a halcyon sea of light, and provoked the heart to a strange and unreasonable yearn-

ing. And beneath the clouds the solemn mountains reposed in dark silence, as if charged with the profoundest secrets of the Maker of the World which they might utter some day in pæans of triumph.

The Prince was standing on the terrace, surveying the beautiful prospect, when from the corner of his eye he caught sight of a dark figure with a white top pass along behind him from the end of the terrace towards the door—pass with the manner of wishing to avoid notice. Prince Hermann wheeled about.

"*Hold!* is that you, Cancellarius?"

The figure with the white head halted, and came towards the Prince. "Yes, your Royal Highness, it is I. Has your Royal Highness dined?"

"Yes, Cancellarius." The Prince's eye was lingering on the clenched right hand of the old man, from whose grasp a corner of paper protruded. "Any word from my father?" he asked.

"No word yet, sir, from your father, the king," answered the Cancellarius.

"Ha!" said the Prince, "is that so?" His

eye still played upon the clenched hand of the Cancellarius, as if he would inquire concerning it; but he did not. "Then," said he, "we must move without him."

A quick fear palpably shot through the Cancellarius. "Let me entreat you, sir, to wait at least one day. One day is not long to wait for the decision of so important a matter, sir."

"But I have already decided, Cancellarius. I only seek ratification, as a matter of form."

"Oh, sir," entreated the Cancellarius, "be patient for a day. Since you have no doubt, four-and-twenty hours can cause the loss of nothing that is serious. Precipitate haste is for those who fear, sir, not for those who are confident. Occupy to-morrow, sir, on the mountains with the deer. There has come a message from the well-born lord of Strathconacher: 'Is the Prince Hermann ill? He has not been heard of in the shooting this week at all.'"

"No," said von Saxe, drily, "his Royal Highness has been fishing, and," he added, in a lower voice, "he has caught a water-witch! Sir," said he, aloud, to the Prince, "I beg of you, let us have the sport of men on the moun-

tains to-morrow, for the day after we know not what may happen."

"The day after," said the Cancellarius, "is the day of the Highland sports at Strathconacher Castle."

"True," said von Saxe.

"Very well," said the Prince, "I will not spoil pleasure. To-morrow we shoot. And so," said he, flinging his cigar away, "it must be early to bed, for it will be early to rise—to seek the deer."

"That is so," said the Cancellarius, with relief.

They all went in. They separated on the instant, and anon the Cancellarius sat alone in his favourite place, the library. He sat over that novel of Sir Walter Scott's which he had been reading during intervals of the day's unexpected trouble—Rob Roy—but he did not read: he could not. He was now more than troubled: he was in a quandary. The Prince believed he was waiting for a reply from the King of Boeotia, and he had truly sent no message: the Prince would be very angry—oh, very angry!—if he discovered that. What could the

fluffy-headed and puzzle-brained Cancellarius do? The line of relief he had chosen to try was closed: neither the English Government nor (apparently) the English Queen could do anything to aid his purpose. They might bring persuasion to bear, but persuasion took time and persuasion was of doubtful avail. What was needed was a peremptory order to be carried out by Government police. That, however, was clearly not to be had in Great Britain—marvellous to relate! Yet the Cancellarius was resolved that he would not make appeal to the king until every other device had been tried. And so he sat with his pink finger-tips together, trying to compass some device, and in lapses of attention letting his eyes read a line or two of Rob Roy. Suddenly he sat upright with a gleam of discovery in his eye—as when a poor man, fumbling in his pocket to find a shilling, brings forth an unexpected sovereign.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, with an erect forefinger in the air, “That is so! I will! Yes!—Yes, I will!” He rose from his chair and marched with speed and excitement to and fro the length of the spacious apartment. He rubbed his pink,

innocent-looking hands; he gurgled "Ha! ha!" like a blessed baby; and he chuckled aloud with glee. "With care! with care!" he murmured, holding up to himself a monitory finger. "Yes; I will do it with care!" And at length, altogether jubilant, he departed to bed.

The Herr Cancellarius was not a sportsman. Therefore, when all the rest of the Prince's retinue had gone with the Prince to the hills to stalk the deer, the old man still kept his chamber. Yet breakfast at the manse was barely cleared away, and the Colonel's back had no more than disappeared down the green road to the Water of Conacher, when from the other direction there came a two-wheeled dog-cart containing only, besides the driver, the fluffy-headed Herr Cancellarius.

"Mums," exclaimed Mamie, "here's the white owl! What can he want, I wonder?"

"*Who*, my dear?" asked her mother, raising her eyes from her morning chapter of Anthony Trollope.

"The Herr Cancellarius from the castle," she answered. "Oh, you know," she added, in answer to her mother's insistent gaze, "I call

him the white owl because he has that fluffy white head, and because he looks as wise as an owl, and, I believe, isn't a bit wiser."

"Really, my child!" exclaimed the mother. She could not say more, for she turned to catch a glimpse of the Cancellarius through the window, and at the same time the maidservant knocked at the door to say "the old German gentleman from Ardnashiel" was in the act of coming up the path.

"Show him into the study," said Mrs. Herries-Hay.

She rose, adjusted her coquettish matron's cap, smoothed her dress, garnished her countenance with a becoming smile, and was ready to greet the Herr Cancellarius. She put in the moment of waiting by murmuring sweetly to her daughter, "I wonder what he has come for."

"May I come in with you, mums?" asked her daughter, twisting her plait in the recklessness of curiosity. "You don't want the fun of him all to yourself—do you?"

"The fun of him?" chided her mother, softly. "My dear, do not use such words!"

When Mrs. Herries-Hay, followed by Mamie, entered the study, the Cancellarius was perusing the calf-backs of the minister's books. He turned at once, with a fine bouquet of red and white roses in his hand and a sugared compliment on his lips.

"Dear madam," said he, with his German boots quite close together, "permit me to make an offering of sweetness and beauty to beauty and sweetness themselves."

("Why doesn't he say 'colour,' too?" whispered Mamie to Meg: she had just come down to discover what the appearance of the dog-cart might mean, and she stood now in the open doorway.)

"I hope the Fraülein Herries-Hay," said he, noting Meg, "has no ill effects of her immersion of yesterday? But I see she has not; she blooms."

"And the Prince," put in Mrs. Herries-Hay, "is he well?" She motioned the old man to a seat, and they all sat down.

"He blooms also," said the Cancellarius. "This day he blooms upon the mountains. Ha! ha! He have gone to stalk the deer."

"Has he given up fishing, then?" asked Mrs. Herries-Hay.

"He will no more fish, madam—for the time," answered the Cancellarius. "He have fished enough—for the time. But I have not come, madam, to consume the time with gossip—the time which should in the air place more of the rose in the face of madam and her fair daughters."

"Oh, no matter for that, Cancellarius," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, "John Macaulay has not yet begun to get the pony ready."

"Ah, madam, *MacOwlay*. Yes, I remember before you have said *MacOwlay*," said he, bending on her his owlsh eyes. "The clan of *MacOwlay*: it still dwell in this district so as in the time of the great Marquess of Montrose?"

Mrs. Herries-Hay recalled what she had declared on Monday on that point, and she made haste to say, "Oh, yes; just the same."

"Soh. And the men of *MacOwlay* still are wild?—*farouche*?"

"Well," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, a little doubtful whether she might not commit herself

to statements of too extravagant a kind, "I am not quite sure——"

"Oh, mamma," broke in Mamie, "you know John always has a very wild light in his eye! Hasn't he, Meg?"

"Yes," assented Meg; "I think he is really quite a wild Highlander at heart."

"Soh," said the Cancellarius, with earnest attention: "wild—Highland—and *farouche* at heart. That is soh?"

"Quite soh." That was an assent that Mamie could not help uttering for the whole assembled family.

But Mrs. Herries-Hay, perceiving neither sense nor purpose in these questions and answers, arrived at the conclusion that the Cancellarius must have something which he was keeping for her private ear. She, therefore, took that opportunity of bending as stern a look as she could command of disapproval upon her frivolous and mocking child, and of finding excuse for dismissing her, in the full expectation that then Meg would retire too.

"Mamie, my child," said she, "just see that John has not got into one of his High-

land dreams and forgotten all about the pony."

Mamie rose reluctantly; and Meg rose also, saying, "I think, mother, that I'll go and keep father company."

When the girls had withdrawn, the Cancellarius (to Mrs. Herries-Hay's surprise) returned to his foolish subject of "*MacOwlay*." "Dear madam," said he, "you have said 'Highland dreams' this moment when you speak of the *MacOwlay* man: what is that?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, desiring to dismiss the matter, "he believes, and all his friends believe——"

"All the other *MacOwlays*?" suggested the Cancellarius.

"Yes," said the lady, carelessly; "they all believe that he has the second sight."

"Ah," exclaimed the Cancellarius, as if he had met a remarkable coincidence, "like *Angoose*!"

"Like *Angoose*?" queried the lady.

"Like *Angoose MacOwlay*," explained the Cancellarius, "in the book of The Legend of Montrose."

"Ah, yes, to be sure; just so," said Mrs. Herries-Hay.

"It is strange and wonderful, madam—is it not?—in our day of the steam and the electricity that these people of the Highlands continue so as they were many, many years since—wild, *farouche*, and with the second sight!"

"It is very wonderful," said the lady, weary of the subject and wondering when he was going to touch on the purpose of his visit.

"They do not change at all in many years—*hein?*" said he. There was a query at the end of his sentence; but it appeared to be mere politeness, and his tone had the ring of entire conviction.

"Oh, scarcely at all," said she.

"It is only that they conceal their disposition more better: is it not so?" said he.

"That is all, I believe," said she, and she smiled and nodded as if she were making a sly admission.

"That is so!" said he. "And to-morrow, dear madam—to-morrow, at the place of the well-born lord of Strathconacher—the Highland people will assemble, come from many glens

around, in their dress of war and with their weapons. Is that so?"

Mrs. Herries-Hay now thought she could see what he was driving at: he desired to know if the Highland display would be worth seeing.

"Oh, yes!" said she, with a gentle gush of enthusiasm. "It will be splendid! I have only seen that sort of thing once before—years ago! and it quite carried me away!"

"Carried you away, madam?" exclaimed the Cancellarius, with owl-like eyes of astonishment, and, as it were, triumph.

"Oh, yes!" said she. "The Highlanders in their tartans, and with their claymores——!"

"Claymores, madam? *Was ist das? Ach!* I remember: the swords of the Highland people! that is *soh!* And they fight with their swords, *hein?*"

"Well," said Mrs. Herries-Hay, "they fence and they dance. It is at night that the display is best: torchlight march and torchlight dances! It is a sight you should not miss, Cancellarius."

"I will not miss, madam," said he, promptly; "we all go."

"Ah, that is right," said she, with pleasure in her smile, and speculation of profit in her eye.

"And, dear madam," said the Cancellarius, bowing before her, "shall we not have the agreeable sight there of you and your beautiful and well-born daughters?"

"We have accepted the invitation to be present, Cancellarius," said she.

"Ah, that is well! That is soh!" said the old man, with palpable satisfaction.

Mrs. Herries-Hay wondered a little that he seemed so pleased. "But," said she, to herself, "he must have only come to ask if we were going. I wonder why."

CHAPTER XV

THE GATHERING OF THE CLANS

FRIDAY was a glorious day, even for the picturesque and romantic Highlands of Perthshire—a wonder of weather in a land that has more enchanting changes and charms than any other district of these islands. The sun rose early, and so did all the inhabitants of the Strath and of the glens round about. At first the great mountain-tops were wreathed in languorous nightcaps of white mist, but quickly these melted and became merely a trembling haze of heat. And still as the day grew the fiercer grew the sunshine, till the exposed sides of granite rocks felt to the hand like the surface of an oven; the great, tangled dry roots of heather on the moors writhed and crackled; and the white and dusty roads were baked to a powder as scorching to bare feet as the sand of the Sahara. And there were many bare feet tramping the roads

that day; for neither Highland lad nor Highland lass would undergo the discomfort and confinement of hose and brogues until the time of public display on the cool grass of the great park of Strathconacher. Most of the bare feet, both human and canine, however, had the sense to seek the narrow green margins of the roads, and, wherever it was possible, the delicious aromatic shade of the stately fir-trees.

But the people who were truly oppressed with the heat were not the pedestrians, but those whom the pedestrians foolishly envied—the riders in coaches and carriages. Thus the Colonel's family (the Colonel himself, like a gallant old soldier, rode a-horseback) arrived in the Strathconacher demesne like elegant birds that had been enjoying a bath of dust; for the minister's old phaeton was so low that they had all the way been involved in the cloud of their triumphal progress from the manse. Mrs. Herries-Hay, however, seemed the only one of the three that was flurried with their condition. It was unlike her to be flurried at all; and yet it was sufficiently like her that since she was flurried, it was not on her own account, but on that of

others. She felt for her daughters, who did not feel for themselves.

"My dears!" she exclaimed, "you look perfect frights! You are as dusty as millers!"

"Angels, madam," corrected a voice, which surprised all three and brought the quick blood to Meg's cheek—"angels what have the wings soiled a little with the dust of the earth: that is all. That is so?"

"Oh, that's a very pretty thing to say, Prince!" exclaimed Mamie, entirely self-possessed—"very pretty, indeed!" she added, imitating a trick of speech of his own.

Then they all greeted him more formally. It was not wonderful that they had not noted his approach; for he was dressed as a Highlander, and in royal tartans, which no one there disputed his right to wear. And, indeed, he looked and bore himself like a right royal personage, and Meg scanned him with an irrepressible flush of admiration and pride.

They were on a high pleasaunce which a cooling breeze from the hills had found out, and where it lingered, dallying with the graceful silver birches, whose trailing foliage began to be

speckled with yellow, and with the rowan-trees laden with clusters of scarlet berries, and here and there with a dark and solemn larch or pine. The Highland breeze played familiarly with the foliage, and, as it were, fingered with wonder and admiration the draperies of the ladies and the kilts and plaids of the gentlemen assembled on the lawn; for it was not every day, nor even every year, that such a display was to be found there. The breeze was cooling, but the dust still clung to the ladies from the manse of Conacher. Prince Hermann led them to a marquee where were attendants who supplied brushes and whisks and more intimate toilet necessities, and likewise refreshing cups of drink. There, also, they found the Count von Saxe and the Herr Cancellarius.

"Why," asked Mamie, aside, of the Count, "do you not wear the Highland dress like the Prince?"

"I can pretend no claim to wear it," answered von Saxe, with a bow.

"And can the Prince?"

"Do you not know?" said von Saxe, opening his eyes on the girl. "He has descent from

the Royal House of Stuart on his mother's side: the Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia, the sister of your unfortunate King Charles the First, was his ancestress."

"Really!" exclaimed Mamie, gazing on the Prince with fresh interest, as if she would discover the Stuart lineaments.

"Truly," said von Saxe. He smiled. "I know why you so look at him when you hear that. You think him greater and of more interest as a descendant of the Stuarts than as Prince of Boeotia."

"Of course," answered Mamie.

"That is strange," said von Saxe, "because the Royal House of Boeotia is of more ancient lineage than the House of Stuart."

"Ah, well, Count," said Mamie, "but the Stuart Kings were our own, and we have no interest in the Kings of Boeotia."

"Is that truly so?" demanded von Saxe, on the instant. "I was thinking otherwise."

For once the adroit girl found she had made a slip in her talk, and for once she blushed. Yet she had the wit to reproach him with taking advantage of her youth and simplicity.

"I don't think that's fair," was all she said; but look and tone expressed all the rest.

At the same time the Cancellarius was discoursing affably with Mrs. Herries-Hay, and the Prince was conversing lightly with Meg.

"Our Prince, madam," the Cancellarius said, among other things, "look handsome, brave, in the Scottish costume of war—*hein?*"

"Very handsome and brave, indeed!" Mrs. Herries-Hay said, with impressment.

"Ya! that is so, madam!" said he, as if the lady had made a notable, original remark. "He look like Roderick Dhu—*ach*, but '*dhu*' does mean '*black*'! No. He look like Fergus Mac-Ivor; or he look like the Rob Roy; or he look like *Angoose MacOwlay*!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Herries-Hay, with genial abandon, "he looks like them all!"

It was at that moment Colonel Herries-Hay appeared, saying, "Oh, here you are!" He declared, with something of an aggrieved manner, that he had been looking for them.

"Why, of course, John!" said his wife, with entire good temper, but a pretence of surprise. "You surely did not expect us to look for you?"

The Colonel pursed his mouth and tightened his brows a little, but he said no more. The pre-luncheon sports were about to begin in the open park, which was beyond the pleasure: all the assembled company of guests was drifting that way, and the Herries-Hay party left the marquee and went thither also, gaily accompanied by Prince Hermann and his companions. There were many who took note of that fact, but for the most part they explained it by the other fact that Colonel Herries-Hay had been attached to the Court of Boeotia.

The Prince, as soon as he could without being overheard, made an astonishing announcement to Meg.

"I have received this morning, from my father, by telegraph, an order to go home."

She paled, but looked at him frankly.

"Will you go?" she asked.

"In my own good time," said he, and returned her frank look.

Meanwhile the piper—a thick stalwart fellow—of the house of Strathconacher marched to and fro, sounding an assembly on his screaming pipes, and the competitors in the games began

to take the grass, and to test with active feet the springiness and slipperiness of the turf, and with careful stride to measure distances. The piping ceased for a time, and the immediate antagonists flung off their bonnets and their coats and advanced arrayed only in shirt and kilt, and tartan hose and buckled shoon.

"But, madam," exclaimed the Cancellarius, to Mrs. Herries-Hay (he kept close to the lady, as if she were a deity of the country and the games, to whom he could freely pour forth the libation of his enthusiasm)—"but, madam," said he, "das Highlandish company—stand they out for the combat?"

"Combat?" murmured Mrs. Herries-Hay, sweetly, with some lack of comprehension. "Do you mean fighting? I don't think they are going to fight; but I don't really know."

"Soh, madam," said the Cancellarius. "One does not know ever what the Highlandish man will do. Is not that so?"

She looked at him and smiled in simple and sweet lack of understanding. Then she turned to her husband. "John," said she, "they're not going to fight—are they?"

"Fight? No!" said the Colonel. He explained that they were about to "put the stone" and "toss the caber," and what not.

"Ah," said the Cancellarius, "the gymnastic!"

"Well," said the Colonel, a trifle curtly, "call them gymnastics, if you like."

"But, Herr Colonel," persisted the Cancellarius, "the Highlandish man and soldier is wild—*farouche*—and he perform always the unexpected. Is it not so?"

The Colonel had in his time served in a Highland regiment, and he was flattered with what he conceived to be the meaning of the Cancellarius' remark. He did not think it had much to do with what was going on, but he agreed with it all the same.

"Oh, yes," he assented; "John Highlandman can astonish you sometimes."

"*Ach! das ist so!*" said the Cancellarius.

So the sports went forward, and he watched them with great interest, giving a careful side-long look now and then to the neighbourhood of Prince Hermann and Miss Herries-Hay; for the Prince, though he did not keep constantly

in Meg's company, persisted in returning to her from excursions among the numerous assemblage. Then luncheon came, and passed, with the Prince parted from his attraction; and after luncheon the sports were resumed, and Prince Hermann again returned to the society of the Herries-Hays, like the wasp to the honey-pot.

"Please," murmured Meg, aside to him, "don't stay so much with me: people stare so, and I'm sure my father is worried."

"It shall be as you wish it, dearest one," answered the Prince; and she thanked him with a quick look.

Much of the afternoon was taken up with a piping contest, which seemed to work the Cancellarius into a frenzy of excitement. Piper after piper strutted up and down the whole length of the ground, swung his tartans, and poured out from his pipes slogan and lament, pibroch and strathspey, till the very air seemed to ache with the sounds. A mere Southron would probably have been driven distracted or have sought surcease in the flowing and frothing bowls of the refreshment tent; but the assembly was almost entirely Scottish—and Highland at

that—and the stranger guests from Boeotia stood it all manfully out. Indeed, the Cancellarius astonished his neighbours—he still stuck to the Herries-Hays)—by expressing unbounded delight and approval.

“But,” said he, “they do themselves excite to war and great deeds thus—is it not so?”

Then, as the afternoon drew on, and dancing was instituted, his excitement still grew. The Highland fling, Gillie-callum, Tullochgorum, the Sword-dance, and what not were performed; and he exclaimed,

“Now they excite them for an expedition by night!—a raid—a plover! *Das ist soh?* Ya!” And when the dancers wildly yelled “Hooch!” he turned with the delighted possession of a great discovery, and exclaimed, “But the Highlandish ‘Hooch’ is the German ‘Hoch!’ That is so!”

And so the gloaming came on, and the time for the grand torch-light parade of the clansmen drew near. The guests were straggling towards the castle, through the dark belt of trees that girt the pleasance, when a voice said in Meg’s ear.

"Ye'll be Miss Herries-Hay—Miss Marget Herries-Hay—I'm thinking?"

"Yes," said Meg, discovering that there was a tall Highlander by her, "that's my name."

"Weel," said he, "I'm to give ye that." And he slipped a note into her hand, and vanished.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ABDUCTION OF MEG

It was not till Meg found herself alone for a moment or two in the marquee, where supper was to be served after the torch-light procession, that she had opportunity to look at her note. She stood by a lamp and hurriedly opened it. It was written in pencil on a leaf evidently torn from a pocket-book:

“To the summer-house beyond the trees, behind the tent of refreshment, come. I await you. I have a thing important to say. Come instantly.”

She assumed, without a doubt, that it was a message from Prince Hermann. The mode of expression was not remarkably like his, but the letters were palpably formed by a German hand. It was singular that he should thus seek a secret interview—and not even appear himself to seek it—but yet he might have sufficient reason. She

glanced at the words again: they were earnest and urgent, and she did not doubt that they were his. She would go at once: he might have received from his father another peremptory order to return! She heard someone enter behind her. She crumpled up the note to thrust into her pocket, and hurried from the tent without looking round.

She would be gone but a few minutes, she said to herself: she would rejoin her family before she could be missed. She slipped into the gathering gloom behind the tent, and then, in an instant, she was swallowed up by the thick darkness among the trees. She plunged forward blindly, trusting to come out upon the summer-house named in the message. But she floundered. She stumbled over a broken branch; she caught her foot in a briar; and she fell softly on a bed of leaves and grass. But she was up with a laugh and on again. Darkness, however, surrounded her on all sides, and she could not guess which way her face should be set. At length she heard a voice.

“Will that be you, Miss Hay?”

"Oh, yes," she answered, "it's me! Where am I?"

"Oh"—and a tall Highlander loomed before her—"ye're just in the bit plantin'. But ye've gone right and round about. And if ye'll gi'e me your hand, I'll tak' ye cannily out whaur ye'll be wanting to be."

"I want the summer-house," said she.

"Hoot, ay!" said the man; "I ken fine what ye'll be wanting."

Having an entire belief in the honesty and honour of the Highland character, Meg let the man lead her on among the trees—until doubts sprang more and more rankly in her mind as the distance they traversed grew and they saw nothing of a summer-house. Moreover, at first she had not been out of earshot of the great assembly; but now there was no sound but that of their own steps, and now and then the alarmed coo of a cushat-dove disturbed in his tree-top by their passage below. Her fears broke out.

"You must be going wrong!" she said.

"We'll be there in a blink, my dearie," said the Highlander.

The man's familiarity gave her a shock. She plucked her hand from his and stood still.

"Who are you that speak to me like that?" she demanded. "Take me back. I insist. You are not leading me to the summer-house. You are leading me astray!"

"Now, hinny, dinna ye be fleyed," * said the Highlander; "it'll be a' right." And he laid a controlling and detaining hand on her arm.

All her woman's fears were then awake and in an agitation of alarm. She flung off his hand and turned to flee. But he laid hold of her again.

"Na, na, ma bonny lass!" he exclaimed, "I canna let ye gang." And, like Roderick Dhu, he "whistled shrill."

In a second or two—during which Meg was so astonished and overcome that she could not cry out—another Highlander loomed upon her vision, crying. "A' right. Ha'e ye got her?" Then Meg set herself a-screaming; but the first man clapped his hand on her mouth, while the second seized her arms.

* Fleyed = frightened.

"Nane o' that, my leddy!" said the first.

"'Od, but she's a strong ane! Just ye ca' canny, and there's naething 'll harm ye. But ye maunna skellock,* and ye maunna be violent."

Again she attempted to scream, and then he insisted on gagging her with her own handkerchief (which he drew from her pocket), while the second bound her hands with a scarf.

"Sorrow fa' me," said the first man, "to be so rough with a bonny lass; but if ye winna ca' canny, be d—d to ye! Now, my leddy, will ye foot it, or will ye no foot it, on your ain feet? If ye will no foot it, I maun just tak' ye up and carry ye, for forrit † we maun gang. We ha'e our commands. And it would be a pity for a bonny young leddy to be carried in the oxters o' twa orra John Hielandmen. As sure as death, there's nae wrang 'll come to ye. So now, like a braw young leddy, step it out yoursel'."

Resistance, Meg saw, was vain. She was hot, ashamed, and angry—exceedingly angry!—but she sensibly submitted to walk between the two men, rather than be carried by them.

* Skellock = scream.

† Forrit = forward.

They had gone but a little way when they were out of the darkness and away from the trees; and there they found a pony waiting, tied to a bush. The pony was furnished with a side-saddle, into which it was signified to Meg that she must mount. She mounted, and she was led away along the mountain side, by a path that wound on and up. At a certain point they saw the Castle of Strathconacher and the crowd of flaring torch-lights below them; and then all was hidden as they turned a hump of the mountain, and saw a wide and lonely moor open before them. Over that they marched, as it were into another land, till the castle was left miles behind, and there was no sound in earth or sky, save at long intervals the cry of some pewit upon whose nest in the heather they had almost trampled. Then, in that world of loneliness and silence, where there was none on whom she might call for help, they removed the restraints from Meg's hands and mouth.

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Meanwhile, by Strathconacher Castle, the scream of the pipes and the flare of the pine-torches made warlike and lurid the swinging

march of the Cameron Men, and the Farquharsons of Deeside, and the Robertsons of Athole, and the MacAulays of Strathconacher. And after the procession there was more dancing—dancing savage and warlike—and the wild “Hoochs!” rent the warm air. Again the Cancellarius, who still kept near Mrs. Herries-Hay, remarked on the similarity of the Scottish “Hooch” to the German “Hoch!” and declared his intention of causing a monograph to be written on the subject when he returned to Boeotia. Colonel Herries-Hay looked on with the half-critical, half-careless eye of one accustomed to military and Highland pageants both; and ever and anon his glance roved round for a glimpse of his daughter Meg. He had not seen her since before dusk fell; but, doubtless, she was looking on from among the crowd. At length it was impressed on him that it was some considerable time also since he had seen Prince Hermann, and then uneasiness crept over him. He stepped close to his wife.

“Where is Meg?—do you know?” he asked, in her ear.

"Where is Meg?" echoed his wife, looking this way and that, but without any touch of alarm manifest either in eye or voice. "Isn't she here?" And she turned her head this way and that again—of course without discovering Meg. But she was completely satisfied. She imagined her daughter must be in the engaging company of the Prince.

"I haven't seen Meg for ever so long," volunteered Mamie.

"Oh," said her mother, easily and soothingly, "she can't be lost here. I dare say she has found a place where she can see well."

"And hear well," added her daughter, who was reproved by her mother with a glance and a surreptitious nudge.

"Don't worry, John," Mrs. Herries-Hay added, to her husband; "she will turn up presently."

"But we must be thinking of getting home," said the Colonel, with his eye still roving over the throng.

"Oh, before supper, daddy?" wailed Mamie.

"If we wait till after," answered he, "we shall not get home to-night." Then, suddenly

bending a glance on the Cancellarius, he asked, "Where is Prince Hermann?"

"I think, Herr Colonel," answered the Cancellarius, primly, "that His Royal Highness is in the castle speaking with some peoples. Is it that you will to speak with him, Herr Colonel?"

"Well, no, Cancellarius," answered the Colonel, with a touch of uncertainty in his tone. "At least, not yet—not just yet."

"Soh," said the Cancellarius.

The Colonel fell silent and waited, while his eye continued to rove. And still the pipers piped and the dancers danced. But the end of these things seemed at hand, and the Colonel, exclaiming, "I can't stand this any longer! I must find her!" set off towards the house, drawing his wife and daughter along with him, for they also were now growing alarmed.

"You may flatter yourself, Maggie," said he, of a sudden, over his shoulder to his wife, "that if anything unfortunate comes of this that you have had a considerable hand in promoting it!" It was said with proper marital sternness and conviction.

"Good gracious, John," murmured his wife, softly, "what can you mean?"

"What can I mean?" he murmured, in exasperation. "You know what I mean."

"Well, John," said his wife, "if you really mean anything at all, you are premature."

Her husband grunted and strode on. There were a good many people about the front of the two great tents. The Colonel came upon an acquaintance, and asked him if he had seen his daughter within the last half hour. The tall one? asked the acquaintance. No; he had not seen her. There was, however, a friend of the acquaintance standing by when the Colonel put the question, and he said that just about half an hour ago he had seen Miss Herries-Hay—(oh, yes, he knew her very well by sight: a very remarkable-looking girl)—he had seen her hurry out of that tent alone just as he happened to enter it. She did not once look round, and there was so eager an appearance of haste and pre-occupation in her manner, that he—to tell the truth—moved out of the tent after her, and saw her turn round by the tent and in among the trees—still in great haste.

"In among the trees!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Good heavens! what should she go in among the trees for?"

"Perhaps," said the acquaintance, "she wanted a short cut to somewhere."

"A short cut to the devil!" exclaimed the Colonel, pettishly.

"Perhaps," murmured the friend, to the acquaintance.

"At any rate, she must have lost her way," said the Colonel, in a more peaceful tone. "Would you mind," he said, to the acquaintance, "coming with me through the plantation to look? I dare say we can prevail upon a couple of these fellows with torches to go with us."

The acquaintance assented, and two men with torches were persuaded to accompany them. The men were tolerably skilled in woodcraft, but the margin of the ground of the plantation had been so trodden that no footsteps in particular were to be recognised or traced. But as they drew away they came upon signs of a solitary advance; and as they pursued them they found additions to those signs; and then, at

length, in a spot somewhat more trodden, they picked up a crumpled bit of paper. It was handed to the Colonel, who spread it out, and read on its back—written in letters of a German quality—

“To Miss Margaret Herries-Hay.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE HUMILIATION OF THE CANCELLARIUS

THE Colonel, by the light of a torch, read the words of the note, with growing rage in his heart and a gathering frown on his face:—"To the summer-house beyond the trees, behind the tent of refreshment, come. I await you. I have a thing important to say. Come instantly."

"Summer-house!" he exclaimed. "Where is the summer-house about here?"

The torch-bearer, who happened to belong to the estate, made answer. "There is not any summer-house hereabout at all, sir. The summer-house will be on the other side of the plant-in', whatever."

"Let us go there," said the Colonel.

They, to all intents, returned on their steps. At any rate, it was necessary for them, in order to reach the summer-house, to cut across the end of the pleasaunce, and so to pass close by

the tents. On the margin of the plantation they came, oddly enough, upon the Cancellarius, alone, and apparently in a meditative mood.

"Herr Cancellarius," said the Colonel, sharply, "where is your master, the Prince? Do you know?"

"Herr Colonel," replied the Cancellarius, and the torch-light flashed luridly on his gold-rimmed glasses, "His Royal Highness is in the castle, speaking with some peoples."

"Still?" asked the Colonel, and bent upon the Cancellarius a frown of suspicion. "He is there still?"

"Still, Herr Colonel. He continues in the castle for the night."

The Colonel considered an instant. He chose his course. "Be so good, sir," said he, "as to conduct me to the Prince, and secure me a private interview with him."

"His Royal Highness, Herr Colonel," said the Cancellarius, with the formal courtliness of his kind, "will not, I think, be able to grant a private interview this night. He is occupied with peoples, and then he will sup, and thereafter he will retire to his private apartment.

Has anything happened to disturb the Herr Colonel?"

It was an effective scene that the tall fir-trees and the lady-like birches looked down upon: the Colonel, grey and lean, like an old staghound, pale and strung tense with fury, which he was politely trying to restrain; opposite him the fluffy-headed, round-bodied old Cancellarius, plainly disturbed, but striving to assert his own dignity and the royalty of his young master in a foreign environment; and the acquaintance of the Colonel, curious about it all, and the torch-bearers holding high their lights to see clearly the combative pair.

"Something *has* happened," said the Colonel. "But my business is with His Royal Highness, and I must see him alone, at once!"

"*Must*, Herr Colonel," said the Cancellarius, "is not a word one should permit one's self to use."

Then the Colonel's fury broke out. "Do not presume, sir," he exclaimed, in the sharp cracks of military rebuke, "to lecture and bully me! I am not a subject of your absurd King-

dom of Boeotia! I am a Scot—and a British subject—and I would have an explanation, and—and reparation—to-night, were the Prince of Boeotia a Prince of the Blood Royal of England! So lead on, sir, or I shall myself bring your Prince out!”

The Cancellarius glanced at the angry Colonel, indulged in a moment's hesitation, and then, with a little stiff bow, he led on to the castle. In the castle the Colonel waited in a private room while the Cancellarius went in search of his master.

In a few moments the Prince came, looking surprised, but completely open and completely alert of countenance.

“You desire a private interview with me, Herr Colonel,” said he; “is that so?”

“That is so, your Royal Highness,” answered the troubled and angry Colonel, holding himself well in hand. “And alone, if you please, sir,” he added, firing a glance at the Cancellarius, who hovered behind the Prince with anxious attention.

“Leave us, Herr Cancellarius,” said the Prince. The Cancellarius bowed himself out.

"Now, Colonel?" He motioned him to a chair, but the Colonel continued standing.

"I am in trouble, your Royal Highness," said he, quite simply, "and it may seem a strange thing that I should bring my trouble to you."

"But why, Herr Colonel?" said the Prince. "Are we not good friends?"

The Colonel bowed. "It is the way of young men, sir, to take their friendships very lightly."

There seemed a tinge of bitterness in the tone, and the Prince began to show uneasiness. "That may be, Herr Colonel," said he, modestly; "but I do not wish to take mine so."

"Then," said the Colonel, "will you tell me, sir—if you know—where my daughter is?"

The suddenness of that question brought a quick colour to the Prince's cheek, for he was still young enough to blush with involuntary promptitude. "You mean Meg—Miss Herries-Hay?" he exclaimed. "I have not seen her for it is two hours, Colonel."

"You do not wonder that I trouble you with the question," said the Colonel, keeping a restraint upon himself, and speaking with clear-

ness and deliberation. "You call her by the familiar name of Meg, sir—which is like a confession of greater intimacy than I care to think of—you have been by her side all the day until, you say, two hours ago, and now, sir, she——"

The Prince broke in upon him.

"Pardon me, Herr Colonel," said he, "but what I did intend to say to-morrow, I now say. I love your daughter—and I think she loves me—and I desire your permission, sir, to make her my wife."

"Your declaration is somewhat sudden, sir," said the Colonel, knitting his brows, "and I am very sorry to hear it. You are young, your Royal Highness," continued he, "and of such lofty station that few would be inclined to apply to your behaviour the ordinary standard of honourable conduct. But, to be plain with you, sir, I cannot regard your proposal of an alliance with my family as anything but a dishonour."

The Prince flushed angrily, and exclaimed, "Herr Colonel——!" But the Colonel interrupted him.

"Sir," said he, "I am an old man, and I am her father, and I am not used to picking and

choosing my words like a courtier. Perhaps you consider that your declaration is timely. You intend it, I presume, sir," he went on, growing angrier with the sound of his own voice, "as an explanation or a condonation of my daughter's disappearance."

"Disappearance, Herr Colonel?" exclaimed the Prince, surprise and bewilderment for the moment overcoming his strong feeling of offence. "She has disappeared?"

"Sir," said the Colonel, bluntly, "either I am a blundering old fool, or you play a very bold but useless game of ignorance. Do you mean to tell me you know nothing of that?" And he shot out at the Prince the note he had picked up addressed to Meg.

The Prince took the note, read it, frowned, considered an instant while he furiously pulled and twisted his long moustache. At length he made answer, "No, Colonel, I know nothing of that."

"Then, sir," rapped out the Colonel, "I am compelled to say—I don't believe you."

To the Colonel's surprise and indignation, the Prince looked at him quietly, and said,

"Under the circumstances, Colonel, I admit that it is altogether quite natural that you do not believe what I say. But you will believe soon. It grieves me, Colonel," he continued, "that you interpret my conduct as with the bad, the dishonourable motive. But I do not blame you; for you do not know that I have for some days waited my father's word to offer to your daughter true marriage — not marriage morganatic."

The Colonel looked incredulous, and exclaimed, "That is nonsense, sir!—sheer folly!"

"The Cancellarius knows the whole matter," said the Prince. "You will permit me to call the Herr Cancellarius? I have the opinion that he is not far away."

He marched quickly to the door, and flung it open: in the corridor was the Cancellarius, pacing to and fro. He entered at the Prince's summons.

"Herr Cancellarius," said the Prince, putting his hands behind him, standing squarely between the Colonel and the fluffy-headed old courtier, and speaking in German, "you will be so good as to relate to the Herr Colonel what I

said to you concerning his daughter three days ago."

"Three days ago?" said the old man, twirling his eye in remembrance, but at the same time making careful observation of both his young master and the Colonel. "Ya; it was three days ago, your Royal Highness, that you desire me with you to go to the Herr Colonel to demand the hand of his daughter in marriage—not the marriage morganatic," he added, with an emphatic smile at the Colonel.

"And you hindered me from going," said the Prince. "Tell the Colonel why."

"Because, Herr Colonel," said the Cancellarius, "it was my opinion of your lofty honour that you would not desire to hear such a demand, unless it bore also the sanction of the King of Boeotia, his Royal Highness's most illustrious father."

"And then?" said the Prince.

"Then, your Royal Highness, you laid your commands on me, to obtain the sanction of the king, your father most illustrious."

"And you have not yet done so?" said the Prince.

"Your Royal Highness," said the courtier, "I have been active in employing the needle of the telegraph."

"Which appears, Herr Colonel," said the Prince, "to be no quicker than the pen."

"The telegraph having failed of answer, your Royal Highness," said the Cancellarius, "I have also employed the pen."

"Then you would have me still to wait?" exclaimed the young man, with a new, a sharper note of intimate personal interest.

"I would still desire you to wait, your Royal Highness."

The Colonel thought he understood completely the conduct and design of the Cancellarius, and he broke in with, "I don't know why I stand listening to all this. What I wish to know is, how and where my daughter has disappeared."

Then the Cancellarius plumped into that new business with singular promptitude and interest.

"She has disappeared!" he exclaimed; "the Fraülein Herries-Hay! But what wonder! What can be thought or suspected, Herr Colo-

nel, except that the Fraülein had been abducted by the banditti of the country."

"Banditti of the country?" exclaimed the Colonel. "What banditti? There are no banditti, sir, in Scotland! You must be thinking you are among the mountains of Sicily, or of Macedonia!"

"Sir, you do of a truth forget," said the Cancellarius, with the smile of a man who has learnt, and who knows—who is secure in his knowledge—"that you have your Highlandish clans—your robbers—your caterans! They have been around us all the day—have they not? To-day they have seemed peaceful; but at heart they are as they ever were—wild, *farouche*, and, to say it in brief, *Highlandish*! That is so—*hein?*"

"You are strangely mistaken, Herr Cancellarius, I do assure you," said the Colonel, whose astonishment at hearing the old courtier's opinion was breaking into a smile of amusement. "The Highlanders are not robbers, nor caterans, nor bandits. The clansmen you have seen to-day are quiet farmers and servants; and I venture to say that not one of them has ever robbed

or fought with weapons in his life—unless he should be an old soldier.”

“But, sir,” exclaimed the perplexed and doubting Cancellarius, “there are still Highlandish people like Rob Roy, and the Dougal Creature, and Fergus MacIvor, and like *Angoose MacOwlay*?”

“Not one, sir!—not one!” answered the Colonel curtly. “But all this talk does not bring me nearer the purpose for which I came here.”

“It does, Colonel—believe me,” said the Prince, who had listened to the Cancellarius with close attention. “And you will discover it instantly.”

“But,” said the Cancellarius, who was so concerned with the destruction of his fond belief in Highland bandits that he paid no heed to the words of the Prince, “Madame Herries-Hay did assure me that the Highlandish people were wild, *farouche*, as ever and always.”

“My dear sir,” said the Colonel, “my wife’s opinion of the condition of the Highlanders is just as valuable as mine would be of the man in the moon.”

"But, Herr Colonel," cried the Cancellarius, "Sir Walter Scott——!"

"Dear sir," said the Colonel, with some impatience, "you cannot have forgotten that Sir Walter Scott has been dead for more than half a century, and the condition of things in the Highlands which he pictured had been dead then for more than another half century. The Highlands you seem to believe in, sir, ceased to exist more than a hundred years ago."

"And now," exclaimed the Cancellarius, in a tone of lapsed faith and lamentation, "there is no more any romantic one in your Highlands!—no more any being, wild and *farouche*! Is that what you say?"

"There is no creature, sir, more *farouche* than a salmon or a stag," said the Colonel.

"Then," said the Cancellarius, with a bewildered resignation, "I have been very much mistaken!"

"Very much mistaken, indeed, Cancellarius!" exclaimed the Prince, with emphasis. "Is not that, sir, your foolish and absurd handwriting?" He whipped the incriminating note from behind him, and thrust it under the old

man's abashed and troubled eyes. "I am sure that it is. At first I did suspect, but now I know. What is it that you do, sir, meddling thus in my affair? It is the action, sir, of a swine!—a ~~man~~—a creature entirely without sense of fitness!"

The Cancellarius stood with his head bowed and his hands outspread. The Colonel pitied him, though he began to suspect the truth.

"What is it, sir?" said he, to the Prince. "Why are you so angry with the Cancellarius?"

"Do you not understand, Colonel," exclaimed the Prince, angrily, "that he—*he!*—has done this idiotic thing? He has written this, and has caused your daughter to be abducted, thinking with his foolish brain of wool of cotton, that the ridiculous Highland bandits of his own imagination would alone be blamed. And why has he performed this absurd *vaudeville*? To remove your daughter altogether from my company until I am gone away. He knows—who should know so well as he? for I am now sure he must by the telegraph have set my father on to do it—he knows that my father

has commanded my return to Boeotia immediately!"

"I see," said the Colonel. He said no more, but there was a world of enlightenment in his head.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN SEARCH OF MEG

"COLONEL," said the Prince, when the Cancellarius was gone—dismissed, after he had confessed how and whither Meg had been abducted—"the hour grows late. You are tired, and your family must be tired. Permit me to arrange that you all rest here to-night, and let me ride over the mountains and bring her back."

"Your Royal Highness," said the Colonel, looking on him kindly, "I cannot think of troubling the Strathconacher family, especially since I wish to keep quiet this awkward occurrence. I must send the remainder of my family home to the manse; and I myself, sir, her father—it is only fit—must ride over the hills to bring my daughter back."

"Colonel," said the Prince, turning aside and pettishly kicking the carpet, "you will not trust me."

"It is a dangerous thing, your Royal Highness," said the Colonel, with a shake of the head, "for a young lady of middling station to be loved by a Prince."

"At least," said the Prince, "you will permit me to ride with you."

"The Highland dress, sir," said the Colonel, with a smile indicating the costume which the Prince still wore, "is not well adapted for riding."

"Then I will walk," said the Prince. "And I will put this thing"—pointing to his *skene-dhu*—"into the heart of any man who has done her wrong."

"I think," said the Colonel, "there will be no need for that. The Highlanders will have behaved well enough, sir, you may be sure; and the only harm that will happen to her will be distress of mind. But, if you will come, sir, you will."

"Thank you, Colonel," said the Prince, on an impulse of simple boyish gratitude.

In a little while the Colonel had sent his wife and younger daughter home, and the Prince had made his excuses to his hosts of the castle—

he must return at once to Ardnashiel, but he would return alone, if a horse and a guide would be lent to him—and then the two, father and lover, rode away over the hills through the dark, led by a Highland gillie on foot.

That midnight ride over the hills, through the scented woods, and up among the sweet heather, became a precious memory to both the old soldier and the young Prince. It brought them nearer to each other than all former meetings, and let them feel the very pulse of each other's thoughts, and lay their hands on the muscles and sinews with which they each held on to life. Once through the plantation, and up the steep brae of the hill, they were upon the wide moorland, where the breeze blew strong and fresh as upon the roof of the world. They were in the empyrean, a hundred degrees nearer heaven than when they had stood together in the castle below. Their brains were cleared and their minds were purged; and they talked—yes, they talked!—as only youth or Celtic blood can make men talk. And as they talked, in the under-tow of his thoughts the Colonel was convinced that his companion would be the finest,

manliest, most desirable young man in the world, if only he was not a Prince; and in his talk he opposed and lectured him with the adroitest resolution. For the Prince steadily urged his suit for the hand of Margaret, and the Colonel as steadily refused to entertain any of the Prince's specious reasons. The Prince pleaded with all the fire and recklessness of youth, and the Colonel replied with all that wisdom of experience and caution which hot and eager youth regards as little as the thistle-down. And this is how their argument ran.

"I have understood, sir," said the Colonel, "that you were engaged to the Princess Ernestine of Starkenburg."

"That, Colonel, was only a political arrangement," answered the Prince, "which I can cast aside as easily as I throw away this cigar—and with as little sense of loss."

"That is dangerous, sir," said the Colonel, pulling up. "The heather is dry and might very easily in that way be set on fire." He dismounted, and stepped aside to tread the life of the cigar out. "Permit me, sir," said he, when he had remounted, and they were jogging on

again, "to draw a lesson from that. The thoughtless repudiation of your engagement with the Princess Ernestine might cause great political trouble—indeed, it might provoke a political conflagration. The king and the people of Starkenburg would take it as an insult. And permit me to point out, sir, that your royal rank entails upon you duties to your father and to your country—sacrifices even—that a private gentleman need not concern himself with."

"You would say, Colonel," observed the Prince, with a touch of sarcasm, "that a prince must crucify his affections, and in order to continue a prince become half a man."

"The affections need not be crucified, sir—though passion may," said the Colonel. "It is necessary to distinguish. But for the matter of that, I cannot see why a princess should not be as worth falling in love with as another woman."

"She is not, Colonel," said the Prince, with obstinate conviction; "and that is all. I know many princesses, and I say it."

"How the tastes and views of men differ!" said the Colonel. "I have known some princesses and seen more, and certainly I thought

—even the Princess Ernestine—well, I think I should have jumped at the chance of marrying a princess, if I had had it!”

“Fortunately, you did not have it, Colonel,” said the Prince, with a laugh.

“That is just it,” said the Colonel. “It seems to me mere wilfulness—a mere aberration of preference for the unfamiliar and the forbidden: it is mere perversity, sir.”

“It is, Colonel, as it is,” said the Prince, “and you may call it by whatsoever name you will. But neither bad names nor good reasons will touch a man convinced. And this is the truth—to cut away the half of me that is your daughter is to leave me half a man.”

“Well, sir,” said the Colonel, after a pause, “let us suppose that I agree to your proposal concerning Meg——”

“Ah, I thank you, Colonel!” broke in the Prince.

“But only for the sake of the argument!” exclaimed the Colonel. “We *suppose* it only. What then? You are then just at the beginning of your difficulties, sir. How can the heir to the throne of Boeotia make my daughter his

consort? It cannot be done, sir!" said the Colonel, in triumphant finality.

"Yes, sir," said the obstinate and insistent Prince; "but it can. The heir to the throne of Boeotia will abjure his heirship. You say yourself, Colonel, that a private gentleman need not crucify his affections. Well, I will make me a private gentleman. I shall give up my royal rank. What is royal rank? *Pif!* it is only a little higher and a little more precarious than my seat on this horse. And, as a private gentleman, I can still sit a horse and use a sword. I will be a soldier."

"But suppose, sir, that your sacrifice of your rank would be vain," demanded the Colonel, with a grim smile. "Suppose a private gentleman—and especially a private German gentleman, for the word 'German' is not at present in good odour among us—suppose that he should be even less agreeable to me as a suitor for my daughter than a German prince."

"Colonel," said the young man, in a voice of genuine surprise and emotion, "you do not mean that!"

"No, my lad," said the Colonel, for his lik-

ing and his generosity were deeply touched, "I do not!"

"Ah," exclaimed the Prince, in a burst of boyish glee, "you have already reduced me!—you address me just as a private gentleman! I thank you very much, Colonel: it is done!"

The Colonel sadly shook his head. "It was but a slip of the tongue, sir."

"Then, Colonel, let the tongue continue to slip."

"It cannot be, sir," said the Colonel. "Your royal position is not got rid of so easily. You are bound to it by many subtle ties, and the cutting off of one or two of them would irritate instead of relieving you."

"I shall cut them all!—every one!" exclaimed the Prince. "I shall withdraw from Boeotia and from Germany altogether! I shall become an English subject; and I shall offer my sword to the Queen of England!"

"And suppose you do all that, sir, and suppose you marry my daughter—only *suppose* it," said the Colonel—"then I venture to say that ten years afterwards, when the passion for a girl had died a natural death—oh, quite natural, sir,

I assure you—I have gone through it in my time, and I know it—and when the colours and the values of life had changed, like the bits of tinted glass in the thing-um-bob you looked through when you were a boy—*kaleidoscope*, they call it, don't they?—well, then, I venture to say you would bitterly regret what you had done. No, sir; no woman is worth the sacrifice of so much!”

“True, Colonel,” said the Prince; “no woman but one, and she is your daughter.”

“My daughter, sir,” said the Colonel, “is a good-looking, well-disposed, and healthy girl, that I admit. But as for——!”

“It is manifest, Colonel,” cried the Prince—“oh, yes, it is manifest!—that you are only her father. To speak of her thus in dull prose!—Oh!”

“Life, sir, for by far the greater part of the time is lived as prose is read; and the little tags of poetry we try to run in to make it read better are pretty poor stuff.”

“I cannot agree in that, Colonel!” said the Prince.

“Then, sir,” said the Colonel, “we must

agree to differ in that—and in the whole matter.”

Thus they talked, but at greater length by far, and with more twists and turns and doublings than this story could find space to report; and anon they arrived at their destination.

“This, sirs,” said their guide, “will be the bit sheilin’, whatever. But there will not be anybody in—no, and indeed and mirover, sir, not a single living soul.”

That was the place—called Neil Gow’s sheiling—whither Meg had been abducted according to the declaration of the Cancellarius. It was a shepherd’s hut larger than common for a sheiling, built in a hollow of the moorland and in the shelter of a great peat-stack and a dense clump of whins. They pushed the door open: there was no one within, and the only sign of recent occupation was a small fire of smouldering peat.

“You are sure this is Neil Gow’s sheiling?” asked the Colonel.

“Indeed, sir,” was the answer, “and this will be Neil Gow’s, whatever, and I will be

thinking it wass Neil Gow's before I was born."

The Colonel and the Prince looked each other anxiously in the face: where was Meg?—and how were they to discover where she was?

CHAPTER XIX

MEG IN PERIL

THE Colonel and the Prince looked in each other's eyes, and then they looked around. The moorland breeze was hushed, as if in expectation of the dawn; already dark, remote, and lofty mountain-tops in the east were outlined with rose-colour, and a subdued, sleepy light was being suffused over the moor. Nothing was plain, and yet nothing was in utter darkness: all things appeared as a blind man might see them on beginning to recover his sight. The dark brown peat-stack close at hand bulked as large as a hill, and it was doubtful whether the clumps of whin-bushes around were not resting beasts. The one thing that caught the eye on the wide featureless moor was a dark, shaggy wood on its western margin.

"I can't think," said the Colonel, "that any harm would happen to her." The Prince

said nothing; and the Colonel continued, turning to the Highland gillie, "Is there any other place near by where they can have gone?"

"There will be, sir," answered the man, "the still-house of Logie-Brochan."

"And where is that?"

"It will be, sirs, a mile, or may be three miles too, ayont there," and he pointed to the south. "And it will be very likely they have stepped out to the still to smell the peat-reek and the making of the whuskey: oh, it will be a grand smell, sirs—very grand, indeed, and very good for the digestion."

"But," said the Colonel, "they wouldn't take a lady with them there?"

"Indeed and mirover, sirs," said the man, with a smile, "it will not be a leddy that will put John Hielandman about: the leddy will be very welcome to their company—oh, very welcome, indeed."

"Do you understand, sir?" said the Colonel, turning to the Prince, who was slowly tramping about, and peering this way and that.

"Oh, perfectly," said the Prince. "But, if they have gone to the still-house, I do not believe she has."

"Then, where can she have gone?" demanded the father, with a kind of distraction in his voice.

"I do not know," said the Prince—meaning nothing, and scarce knowing that he said anything; for he had espied something that seized his attention. He stepped out quickly and scrambled through a clump of whins on the western side of the hut, and from among the thorns picked out a scrap of white. He returned with it to the Colonel, and they examined it together. It was undoubtedly a scrap of white muslin, and quite fresh.

"It must have been torn off as she passed through them," said the Colonel.

"It is true," said the Prince. "But in coming in or in going out: which? If in going out, then," said he, making an imaginary line with his glance from the door of the hut to the whins, "she went that way," and he pointed westward.

"I can't think that, sir," said the Colo-

nel. "If she went straight ahead thinking to get back, that's the wrong way altogether."

"But, Colonel," persisted the Prince, "it is possible she has taken the wrong way."

"I don't think so," said the Colonel; "she knows the country too well. I think we had better go on to the still-house where the Highlandmen may be."

"I do not wish to find the Highlanders," exclaimed the Prince, impatiently: "I wish to find her."

The Colonel looked at him and considered. "Imphm!" he murmured: the doubt and perplexity of his Scottish nature were expressed in the sound.

The familiar utterance caught the attention of the gillie; he glanced with new understanding at the Colonel, and from him to the Prince, and echoed the sound—"Imphm!"

"I do not wish to go to the still-house, Colonel," persisted the Prince. "Go you, and I stay here: I do not like to leave this."

"Very well, sir," said the Colonel, and prepared to remount. "I shall not be long," he

added, as he trotted off, the gillie legging it by his side with his hand on the stirrup.

"Pray do not haste, Colonel," said the Prince, to himself, as he watched the Colonel go: "I must find her myself before you come back."

He had set his mind on being the sole person to discover her, and he had formed a theory which separated her altogether from the company of her abductors: which was that they had shut her into the hut, and then slipped away—to smell, probably, "the peat-reek and the making of the whuskey"—and that then she, discovering their absence, had escaped. He moved around the hut, searching with his eyes for some further token of the presence or of the flight of Meg; and in the meanwhile the Colonel was disappearing over the moor, and the dawn was beginning to light it up with something like clearness. Then he moved in wider circles, and at length on another, a remoter, whin-bush he came upon a second scrap of white. Glancing back at the spot where he had found the other, and still back at the hut, he saw that Meg must have made a straight line outwards to the west;

and so with no more hesitation he started off on that line, noting with interest and curiosity that it pointed right at the dark and shaggy wood in the distance. His going was exceedingly difficult for some time, because he sank to the knees among dry and twisted and tough roots of heather; and he pitied her for the trouble and pain her tender limbs must have experienced if she truly went that way. It was only possible to make speedy progress by leaping. After thus getting over some distance he came upon a sheep-track, and, though it diverged a little from the line he had marked out, he did not hesitate to take it, with the conviction that if she had struck it she must have taken it too.

He was, perhaps, within a quarter of a mile of the wood when he stopped dead, smitten in the ear with a familiar sound. It was remote and faint, but his knowledge of sport and of woodland creatures told him it was the peculiar bellow of a stag. Close upon that there followed another, a keener note, a cry of sharp distress, and—surely!—a human cry! Instantly he pictured Meg in a position of extreme peril—it was not his thought but his imagination that

worked: he did not reason, he only saw—and he started madly off straight for the wood, leaping and tearing through the heather. He paused, before entering the wood, for a repetition of the alarming sounds he had heard; but there came no sound, and the firs and birches, as if newly awakened by the dawn, seemed looking out at him in silent watchfulness, while the dense undergrowth of bracken seemed all ears. He passed through the wire fence that girt the wood, and advanced slowly among the rustling undergrowth; and, as he advanced, he halted at intervals to listen. To his sharp and accustomed sportsman's ear came a sound like the dull thud of an axe-head against the trunk of a tree.

“The butt of an enraged stag!” exclaimed he, to himself, and pushed hurriedly forward. The brilliance of dawn was playing overhead among the tree-tops, but beneath there was only the dimmest twilight. In that dimness he presently described a white female figure with a hand against the trunk of a fir-tree, and a yard or two off a great antlered stag. Both were looking eagerly in his direction, the stag with his head up and his tongue hanging out.

“ Oh, please, drive this brute away!”

It was the appeal of exhaustion and fear, and it was uttered in the voice of Meg. How well he knew the voice!—how, then, it made his nerves thrill and tingle for action! But before he could take another step forward, the stag withdrew his gaze from the Prince, and at the sound of the voice near him recalled the object of his rage, and plunged at her with lowered head. She was unprepared for his attack, and though she endeavoured to put the tree between herself and him, in her haste she tripped and fell, and the stag was over her. With a roar of rage the Prince whipped out his *skene-dhu* and bounded forward. With a sudden hand on an antler he jerked up the astonished brute’s head, and then, quick as thought, plunged the *skene-dhu* into the exposed throat. With a loud “*umph!*” and a long-drawn groan, the stag sank upon his knees, and then his whole bulk collapsed and, with a push from the Prince, lay upon its side.

“ Oh, why have you done that?” cried Meg, who had leaped to her feet as soon as the threat of the beast’s horns had been removed.

Prince Hermann dropped the *skene-dhu*, and

stepped to her with his hands out. He did not answer her question, but asked another instead: "Has he hurt you, dearest one!"

"No," she answered; "but he has kept me at it—for a long time—oh, what a long time it seems!" She laughed; but there was an unmirthful and hysterical catch in her laughter. She put her hand to her head; but that did not steady her, and she would have fallen if he had not caught her in his arms.

"I shall be all right in a moment," she said. "But I am rather shaky. I have been dodging him round and round the tree."

"It is true. It is plain," said the Prince, glancing around at the trampled bracken and soil. "The brute!" he exclaimed. "And your pretty white dress is all torn and dirty."

"Oh, don't look at my dress!" she implored. "And, please, set me down!"

"No," said he, with passionate fervour; "I will not set you down! I will never set you down! I will never let you go at all!"

He pressed his cheek to hers, and she not only let him, but stole her arm around his neck; and that emboldened him to do more than press

her cheek. Then she surrendered herself to his embracing arms with a soft sigh and a rich sense of deliverance and love.

"You cannot walk," said he; "you are tired: I must carry you out of the wood into the sunshine."

And she allowed him to do so. But suddenly, before they were out of the wood, she stiffened in his embrace, and in a sharp, cold tone of surprised recollection she exclaimed, "Oh! set me down, please! I insist!"

The tone made him obey. "What is wrong, dearest one?" he asked.

"I had forgotten!" she said. "That beast drove it out of my head! Why am I here? And why are you here?" she demanded, "instead of being at home in bed." He shook his head faintly, but smiled. "I do not think, Prince," said she, "that it is a good joke. Why did you send me this note?" She thrust her hand into her pocket.

"It is here," said he, producing it from the breast of his tunic, "and not I, but the absurd and preposterous Herr Cancellarius did write it. Come out of the wood and sit for a little while in the sun, and I will tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XX

THE DESPERATE COURSE OF THE CANCELLARIUS

MEANWHILE, the mind of the Herr Cancellarius, closeted in his white, fluffy head with his battered and crushed and resentful self-conceit, rebelled, and rose to the necessities of the occasion—necessities from the point of view of the Chancellor of the King of Boeotia and guardian of Prince Hermann. It was manifest—(it would have been manifest to the dullest white head)—that the attempt to remove the beautiful and enchanting water-witch from the contact and knowledge of the Prince had not only failed, but was likely to make their contact and knowledge more intimate. He well knew the reckless, generous, and defiant impulses of his Prince; he was convinced that he was capable of sending for a chaplain, pastor, or minister as soon as the young lady was brought home, and he had no such knowledge of the Colonel as might lead him

to hope that the angry soldier would oppose a marriage in view of the outrage committed on his daughter.

He was, therefore, quickly resolved what he would do. The Prince had left him to his own devices. He would return at once to Ardnashiell, and take such desperate courses to prevent a matrimonial consummation as the importance of the situation demanded. He disclosed the story of the abduction to the Count von Saxe (at which the Count laughed hilariously), and partly revealed his new design for the accomplishment of his purpose. He claimed the Count's aid—and the claim was allowed—and together they made their excuses to the lord and lady of Strathconacher (their Prince had gone off without them, but perhaps he might need them), and together they departed.

They took counsel together during the drive to Ardnashiell; and, arrived there, they slept for an hour or two—like trained and self-possessed soldiers before an engagement that should be decisive—and then, before the dawn, they were up, ready, alert, and arrayed for action. They ordered a vehicle (in northern Scotland it is called

a "machine") to be got ready, with a pair of stout horses, fit to do thirty or forty miles over hilly ground without a halt; they drank a cup of coffee; and then, while the Count smoked a big cigar, the Cancellarius sat down and wrote in his court cipher two long telegrams: the one to his master, the King of Boeotia (who, while his devoted servant watched and warred for the credit of his ancient crown, was, probably, still snoring on his kingly bed)—urging him to invent any reason that would be effectual in making Prince Hermann leave Scotland on the instant; and the other to the Boeotian Minister in London, begging him to re-exert all his influence with the English Government to get Colonel Herries-Hay and his family removed immediately. Then, these correct and precautionary measures taken, he rose for the execution of his irregular, venturesome, and unheard-of *coup*, which (he conceived) was certain, if nothing else was, to avert and turn aside the Prince's precipitate designs upon matrimony.

He descended into the courtyard of the castle with the Count von Saxe. He eyed the four-wheeled dog-cart, which was waiting ready; he

eyed the coachman sitting on the box; and he eyed the two greys that were impatiently tossing their heads and champing their bits—and then he uttered a momentous question to the coachman.

“My man” (he had laid hold of that as the correct mode of address to a male of the humbler orders), “will these two horses run, constant—through—all the way—over these Highlandish mountains to Balmoral?”

“To the Queen’s, sir?” asked the man, in some natural amazement.

“Ya, my man—to the castle of Queen Victoria will they run?”

“Fine that, sir,” answered the man; “they will be as fit beasts as can be to travel that road.”

“And how long, my man?—how much time?”

“They will be for needing four or five hours to travel all that road, sir. But they will not be for winning back the day, sir: sixty or may be seventy miles in the one day, sir, will be over much for the beasts: the earl will not be for having his beasts over-driven.”

“Ya, ya, my man,” said the Cancellarius;

"that is so: that is correct. And they are fed?"

"Surely, sir, they will be fed."

"And drunken?"

"Weel, sir," answered the man, with a queer eye, "they will be drinking nothing but a drop or twa, or may be three, o' spring watter in the bottom o' a bucket."

"That is so; that is good, my man. And," said the Cancellarius, standing back and eyeing the pawing beasts, "the shoes of them—the foots—are all right? *Hein?*"

"Hech, sir," answered the coachman, "their shoon will be as siccar on their feet as your ain."

"Soh, my man," said the Cancellarius, seating himself in the dog-cart beside the waiting Count von Saxe, "you will go forward on the way to Balmoral."

Thus they set off, at a good, easy pace, along the mountain road, through the clear, brisk air. The Count von Saxe smoked in ease and contentment, but the soul of the Cancellarius was deeply agitated in prospect of what he was going to do.

"I would be very pleased," said the Count, in a deliberate tone of satisfaction, "to live in this country: it is very nice—very agreeable."

"It will be very much better for me," said the Cancellarius, sadly shaking his head, "that I have seen never this country: now to be in Boeotia will be very much better as this."

At a certain early point of the road the vehicle was stopped and the Count descended: it had been arranged between him and the Cancellarius that there he should, as if by chance, waylay the Prince, the Colonel, and the water-witch, and turn the Prince into the road that conducted directly to Ardnashiel. So the Count was left smoking at the cross-roads, and the Cancellarius, with desperate trepidation about his heart, drove on alone. The horses were as good as their reputation, and by nine o'clock in the morning the Cancellarius was being whirled up the avenue to Balmoral Castle. He was received, on sending in his name, by the Queen's private Secretary, who looked something of the surprise which he politely refrained from expressing. The Cancellarius was prostrate with apology, and he expressed himself free-

ly, in the craggy and complex language of Germany.

"It is a fact," said he, "unprecedented in my hitherto blameless history of connection with the royal court of Boeotia! I break the never-to-be-neglected laws of etiquette, and I see with both the eyes of my forward-looking vision that I will be the never-to-be-forgiven object of scorn of all the chancelleries and all the courts of Europe! But urgent necessity knows no law; and it is beyond all precedent urgent that I have an audience of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland!"

"It is very irregular, Herr Cancellarius," said the Secretary, "to present such a request, which, as you must be aware, ought to come through the anciently-arranged and properly-accredited channels."

"Well I know, sir," said the Cancellarius, and he positively grovelled in a self-abasement of politeness, "that the proper, the appointed way—the way which should not be forsaken—is that I should make my representations to the Boeotian Minister in London, that the Minister should make his representations to the Secre-

tary for the Foreign Affairs of your English Government, that the Foreign Secretary should convey the representations to the Cabinet, and then that the Prime Minister should convey the same representations to Her Majesty the Queen. But, *mein Gott*, sir," cried the Cancellarius, breaking out, with trembling and beseeching hands, "while the true, the never-to-be-neglected rules of etiquette are observed, the evil will be done!—the ruin will be accomplished!—as you English say it, the fat will be in the fire!—no remedy will be found! Therefore it is that I come straight to Her Majesty, and not roundabout!"

The Queen's Secretary was not a man of brass; he had bowels of pity, and he felt for the troubled and humiliated courtier.

"If," said he, "you will convey to me what your business is, Herr Cancellarius, I will go to Her Majesty and lay it before her. Her Majesty is just about to finish breakfast, and she may grant you an audience."

"The affair, sir," answered the Cancellarius, "is this, in brief: the Crown Prince of Boeotia is in strong purpose immediately to do a thing

which it is the interest of every Royal Family, great and small, to prevent him from doing—he strongly bends himself to marry a miss of no birth!—and that this very day!”

“A Scottish young lady, I suppose,” said the Secretary, carelessly considering the lace of his shoe—a thick, broad shoe, fit for trampling through the heather.

“Yes; the daughter of a mere old Colonel, who once was your *attaché* at our Court of Boeotia.”

“Ah,” said the Secretary, still carelessly, but with a spark of greater interest in his eye, “a Colonel on half-pay. Well, I suppose the Colonel is willing enough to accept such a marriage, even though it be only morganatic.”

“Herr Secretary—sir,” cried the Cancellarius, swelling visibly with the enormity of the announcement he was striving to make—“the Prince will marry the miss truly!—like a common man!—not in the way morganatic! No, not morganatic!”

“But he cannot,” said the Secretary, now more acutely moved to interest.

“He will throw off his succession to the

throne of his father! He will throw off his rank! He will throw off everything, except his manhood, and so he will marry the miss on equal terms! And he will: he has *la tête montée!* ”

“ But,” cried the Secretary, in rigid dismay, “ that will cause trouble and scandal to all the Courts of Europe! ”

“ The family of the miss,” said the Cancellarius, “ ought to be deported to a strong castle unknown! But your English Government, so wise, so liberal, so timid, says ‘ impossible! ’ ”

“ I will go to Her Majesty,” said the Secretary, rising to his feet, in complete sympathy with the errand of the Cancellarius, “ and tell her your business, sir.”

So the Cancellarius was accorded the extraordinary favour of a private audience with Her Majesty. What passed at that audience, I cannot tell, even if I would. But this I can tell—that Herr Cancellarius, having sent his telegrams from the Queen’s own private office, left the castle with victory perched upon his fluffy-white head, and satisfaction shining on his jocund face,

while a German prince of the Queen's own immediate connection sat beside him in the carriage, which was drawn by two fresh, spanking horses from Her Majesty's own stables. The German prince was accompanying the Cancellarius, to exert his influence, etc., with Prince Hermann to keep him from making a fool of himself, and bringing distress to the minds of all royal personages; and on the way back to Ardnashiel, he was going to turn aside with a message from the Queen to one of her own sons, who was sojourning in her neighbourhood. That message was to request him also to exert his influence, etc., with Prince Hermann, to keep him from making a fool of himself, and bringing distress to the minds of all royal personages. The Prince, the Queen's son, promised to obey the message, and to follow on to Ardnashiel in an hour or so, for the purpose of exerting his influence, etc., with Prince Hermann. It was about luncheon-time when the carriage of the Cancellarius whirled by the manse. The Colonel stood on the green before the door, practising golf strokes with his salmon-gaff.

“ Ha,” said the Cancellarius, to himself, “ all is yet well! ” Then, aloud, he said to the German prince, “ There is the obstructive and preposterous Colonel, and that house is where he and his most objectionable family dwell.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE ROYAL TELEGRAM

THE sun was well up before the Prince and Meg rose from the sheltered spot in the heather, on the margin of the wood, where they had sat down to rest and converse. With its heat and radiance in their faces, and the wind on their backs, they tramped, hand in hand, to their rendezvous with the Colonel at the hut. They unlocked their hands when they approached the hut, where the Colonel and the gillie and the two ponies were waiting.

"So here you are," said the Colonel, looking shrewdly on them both. There was a touch of coldness in his manner and of suspicion. "What took you over to the wood?" he asked his daughter, with a sudden turn upon her.

"Whatever took her over, Colonel," said the Prince, "it was a fine jealous stag that kept her there."

"Oh, a great beast!" exclaimed Meg, somewhat uneasy under her father's eye. "I dodged him, it seemed for hours, round a tree, but at last he would have killed me—gored me to death—if——"

"But by the providence of God," interrupted the Prince, "and by good luck—ha! ha!—I kill him with the *skene-dhu*." And he showed the empty sheath of the weapon.

"Lord-sake!" exclaimed the gillie, who had been listening with extreme curiosity, "will you be meaning, sir, that you stickit ta beast—ta staig—with your knife?"

"Yes, my friend," said the Prince, "the knife did stick, and the beast did fall, and they are both together in the wood now, at this moment."

"Lord-sake, sir!" exclaimed the gillie again, "you will have done it this time! It will be maybe a ten-tined staig!—and stickit like a swine! Eh, but he will be fine and mad when he kens it!"

"You can take a message from me," said the Prince, "to my lord, your master."

"Guidsakes, sir," cried the gillie, "will ye no

be kenning? The bit wood will be in the American gentleman's shooting! Ay, sir, and to be sure, and it will be him that will be a fine and mad man this day, and him not caring a sodger's button for anybody!"

"You are not needed with us any longer—he is not, is he, Colonel?—and so I will be obliged, my friend," said the Prince, "that you go to the American gentleman; make him my compliment, and my excuse that I have kill the stag; and you will say that I could not help it, because the beast was in the act to gore a lady to death. You will say that, and you will bring my *skene-dhu* to me at Ardnashiel, and you will be rewarded."

So the gillie went off over the moor to the westward, while the Prince, the Colonel, and Meg returned homeward. The Colonel was anything but full of conversation; but he seemed rather sad and perplexed than sulky and suspicious. It was arranged that Meg should ride one of the ponies and that the Colonel and the Prince should take turns in riding the other. The Prince, by a pressing question or two, learned from the Colonel that the two High-

landers who had abducted Meg had been found at the still in a happy condition of obliviousness of all common things and ignorance of the serious offence they had committed; but that was the only allusion made to Meg's adventure, and Meg's father asked her then no question concerning it. Thus they continued their return over the moor and down the hill, in comparative silence and careful reserve. When they spoke, it was on matters of indifference, and with wide avoidance of the subject that was next the hearts of all three. For all three seemed subtly aware that that hour of hunger and fatigue was not the time for ending by any means, either by fight or by surrender, the crisis that had arisen.

At a certain point on the road, when they were well towards home, they came upon the Count von Saxe, sitting in the dyke-side, beating bracken with a stick and smoking a big cigar. He had come out for a morning stroll, he said; and he rose and accompanied them without asking leave. The Colonel was then on foot, and the Count, with an easy and sympathetic manner, showed that he was acquainted

with Miss Herries-Hay's adventure, and inquired the particulars of it. But the Colonel was not communicative; and, indeed, after a general word or two, he expressed a kind of wish that no more should be heard of it.

"You would do me a favour, my dear Count," said he, "if you would refrain from anything like a public discussion of this foolish business. To ask that it should not be mentioned at all would be too much—though I should prefer that."

When they came to the point where the nearest way to the manse diverged from the road to the castle of Ardnashiel, the Colonel declared that they must part, and the Prince made no objection. But when the Colonel also offered to leave the second pony with the Prince, the Prince demurred: he had but a little way to go, and the Colonel had still some distance to travel.

"No, Colonel," said he; "if you please, take the pony. I will come over to the manse to-day with the Cancellarius—and then you may give up the pony."

All, except Meg, looked suddenly conscious that, with the mention of the Cancellarius,

something of importance had been said—something that had a clear reference to the conventional and open formalities of matrimony.

“Very well, sir,” was all the Colonel said in reply. “But, if I am not mistaken, the pony belongs to Strathconacher.”

“It is true: it does,” said the Prince, while he pressed Meg’s hand in adieu and she pressed his, right under the Colonel’s eyes.

The Prince and the Count tramped down the fir-scented road together.

“You came out with the purpose to meet me?” said the Prince, suddenly.

“It is true, sir: yes, I did,” answered the Count.

“Why?”

“Well, sir, I was very curious to see how the lady would look after passing through the hands of so many strange men.”

The Count passed off his somewhat disagreeable answer with a slight laugh, and the Prince said nothing, but frowned.

“Where is the Cancellarius?” he demanded, after a little while.

"I do not know, sir," answered the Count, which, though equivocal, was literally true.

"Have you had breakfast?" asked the Prince after another interval.

"No, sir; I have not."

"Then," said the Prince, with a singular and unnecessary ferocity of utterance, "we shall breakfast together, and after that I shall sleep: a good breakfast and a good sleep," he said, as if to himself, "that is best."

When they had entered the castle the Prince inquired again, "Where is the Cancellarius?" But the German servant of whom the question was asked took his cue for an answer from a severe shake of the head of Count von Saxe, and said, "Your Royal Highness, I do not know. The Herr Cancellarius is gone out, but I do not know where at all." Thereupon the Prince sat down to breakfast in silence, having first been divested of his Highland dress.

"Give me a cigar, Saxe," he said, as soon as he had eaten and drunk sufficiently. Von Saxe gave his Prince one of his own big cigars; but before an inch of it was smoked the Prince slumbered peacefully on the lounge where he had

stretched himself. When he woke he looked around him (half expecting to find himself among the heather), and then he looked at his watch: it showed past the usual hour for luncheon. He touched a hand-bell. The German servant came.

"Where is the Herr Cancellarius?" he asked; "he must be in by now!"

"You inquire for me, your Royal Highness?" said the Cancellarius himself, from the open door.

He came forward, showing little sign of embarrassment to the superficial scrutiny of the Prince.

"Cancellarius," said Prince Hermann, rising to his feet and stretching himself, "after luncheon I desire that you go with me to the house of the Colonel Herries-Hay."

The Chancellor scratched his cheek in perplexity. "Your Royal Highness," said he, "I beg that I may remind you of your promise to wait until I had received a word from your illustrious father the king."

"I promised, Cancellarius," said the Prince, "only to wait until yesterday was past: well, this

is to-day. Besides, the word of my father came to me yesterday. I obey him. I go to Boeotia on Monday; but, first, I arrange this matter here. No, Cancellarius, I will hear no more arguments from you. Since the insult you have put upon the lady, I expect you to be dumb: it is only on that condition that I say no more of what you have done."

"I was merely going to say, your Royal Highness, that we cannot move immediately after luncheon, because, sir, guests have arrived—distinguished guests."

"Guests!" cried the Prince, frowning in impatience. "What guests?"

"One of England's own princes, sir," answered the Cancellarius, "Her Majesty's own son, Prince Charles, and also your cousin, Prince George of Schwangau."

"Herr Cancellarius," cried the Prince, in furious suspicion, "you have brought them here!"

"Sir," said the Cancellarius, "I beg to assure your Royal Highness that they have come of their own accord, and the Prince of England has driven up but one minute ago."

"What have they come for?" said the Prince, still alive with suspicion.

"That, sir," said the Cancellarius, "is for your Royal Highness to discover. But, sir, is it necessary that they should have come for other end than to see you, as friends and cousins?"

The Prince said no more, but went out to receive his guests. They gave no hint of the business they had come upon either with eye or tongue; and Prince Hermann sat down with them to luncheon in unsuspecting friendliness, and with the fresh and frank cordiality which was his characteristic charm. Matters of indifference were talked of, and the distinguished company laughed and joked until coffee was served. Then a fortuitous occurrence gave the distinguished guests the cue for the part they had come to play, and that was the delivery of a telegram into the hands of the Cancellarius.

"A foreign telegram, I suppose?" said Prince George of Schwangau, who sat next the Cancellarius.

"It is," said the Cancellarius, bowing over the telegram when he had opened it, "from the king, my illustrious and royal master."

"Ha," exclaimed Prince Hermann, from the head of the table, "and what does he say to you after this long delay?"

"If your Royal Highness will permit me," said the Cancellarius, putting on his gold-rimmed glasses and producing from his waist-coat a gold pencil-case, "I will turn the cipher into intelligible language."

He turned the cipher into German and read it out; and this is the English translation:

"It is too-utterly-preposterous nonsense. All means, gentle or forcible, must be used to keep him from marriage. Are there no enough-well-known friends near to speak to him? Bring him home at once."

CHAPTER XXII

THE ARGUMENTS OF PRINCES

"Ho, ho!" laughed the Prince, the Queen's own son, delicately scratching a wax-light for the after-lunch cigarette, "who is the 'him' who is never 'he'?" And he handed the light to Prince Hermann.

"I am the 'he' who only appears there in the accusative case," said Prince Hermann, with a fine reckless blush, which the flame of the match illumined.

"And what, may I ask, is this marriage that the terrible dad is angry about?" said the Prince, the Queen's own son.

Prince Hermann said nothing, but looked at his cigarette and proceeded to light it.

"Have you broken, then," asked Prince George of Schwangau, "with Ernestine, Hermann?"

"I had never anything with Ernestine to

break, George," answered Prince Hermann. "There was no betrothal, no engagement binding: there was nothing but talk, *pour parler*—air set in motion: nothing more."

"But, now, it would appear that you think seriously of marriage," said the Queen's own son.

"May the name of the lady be spoken? Or, is it——?" The Prince raised his eyebrows and closed his mouth tight.

The Cancellarius could hardly conceal his delight at the turn the talk was taking. He had expected that the two princes whom he had brought to exert their "influence, etc.," would have been embarrassed in their endeavour to fulfil their mission. And so, doubtless, they would have been, had they plumped right into it. But, as it was, with the information conveyed by the king's telegram, they were able to mask their previous information, to push their inquiries with accuracy and yet with an air of innocence, and so to set Prince Hermann in a position of embarrassment.

"The lady's name," answered Prince Hermann, with a simple, frank assertiveness, "is Margaret Herries-Hay."

"A daughter of Lord Hay?" said the English Prince. "I did not know that Herries was part of his family name."

"No," said Prince Hermann, looking hard at the ash of his cigarette—"not a daughter of Lord Hay."

"Herries-Hay?" murmured the English Prince, reflectively. "The Drummond-Hays I know; the D'rymple-Hays I've heard of; but the Herries-Hays—— Have you ever heard of them, George?"

"No; never," answered Prince George of Schwangau, with laconic certainty.

"Who are they, Hermann?" asked the Prince, the Queen's own son.

"I do not know how they are related," answered Prince Hermann, reddening; "I have never inquired. I know only," he continued, with something of defiance and desperation, "that he has served for a long time, and with honour, in the English army."

"General?—Major-General?" asked the English Prince. "I do not yet recall the name."

"No," said Prince Hermann, with a frown,

and indeed (it must be admitted) with a kind of reluctance; "Colonel."

"Colonel!" said the English Prince; the tone made Prince Hermann redden again and cram his half-smoked cigarette down upon the ash-tray.

"What does it matter what is his rank?" demanded Prince Hermann, fiercely.

"True," said the English Prince, with easy readiness. "What can it matter in such a case?—so long as the lady is handsome and charming; and," he added, with a smile and a bow, "I take that for granted."

"Of course," said Prince Hermann, frowning. "But what do you mean by '*in such a case*'?"

"In a love matter like this—a case of '*Ich liebe dich*,' and no more—it is not the family of the loved one that is of consequence, but herself."

"I think you misunderstand," said Prince Hermann. "I have also respect—great respect—both for the young lady and for her family."

"Certainly," said the English Prince; "why not? A colonel is not a contemptible person."

"Still, I think you do not understand," insisted Prince Hermann, growing bolder and more resolute to outface these princes, his seniors. "I have known the Herries-Hay all a long time; and therefore it is not as if I had fallen in love yesterday or the day before. I have known them since two or three years, since they were in Boeotia, and the Colonel Herries-Hay was there the English military *attaché*."

"Ah, now I do remember!" cried Prince George. "It was because of your sentimental affair with the young lady that he left Boeotia: the king, your father, desired it. That is so—*hein?*"

"That is so, sir," put in the Cancellarius.

"Soh," said the English Prince; "I remember also. It is an old infatuation then. Very well, let it have its course, Hermann." And he leaned back, as if he were done with the subject. "Take your pretty bird—a very pretty bird she is, I am sure—and put her in a pretty cage, a very pretty cage: *very* pretty let it be—you can afford it. But—but—but what does the father think of it? An honourable gentleman—a colonel—does not commonly like that kind of thing."

"You forget," said Prince Hermann, with sincerity, "that it was marriage we began the talk with."

"Certainly," said the English Prince; "of course you marry the young lady—after the manner of princes in such a case."

"No," said Prince Hermann, frankly and curtly; "after the manner of men."

The English Prince eyed him an instant. "You can't," said he; "it's impossible—absolutely."

"Why?" demanded Prince Hermann.

"If you were your father's second or third son—if you were not in the direct line of succession—it might be done; it might be risked; but you are Crown Prince, and it cannot be done."

"I can cease to be Crown Prince," said the other.

"Throw away your rank and your chance of the throne of Boeotia?" exclaimed Prince George of Schwangau. "Oh, come, Hermann! That would be madness! We can't allow you to do that!"

"No," said the English Prince; "and you the best-looking prince in Germany, too!"

"Nevertheless," said Prince Hermann, "I am going to do it. Pray—please," said he, holding up a hand, "my position is not open to argument. It is strong, fortified, like a castle"—he smiled to show that he was neither a solemn ass nor an unfriendly churl—"it has been fired at with arguments for a week; but arguments are useless to destroy it." He pushed back his chair, preliminary to rising from table; but the complete action was arrested by a saying from Prince George.

"In that case," said he, looking at the English Prince, "we had better think of going, or we shall not get home to-night."

An instant suspicion flew into Prince Hermann's eye. He sat erect, grasping the arms of his chair, and, unknowingly quoting the words of the Prince of Denmark to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in challenge of their coming, he exclaimed, "You were sent for!" And his glance flashed to and fro upon the princes, and from them to the Cancellarius.

Like their prototypes, the princes replied at first evasively. "Sent for!" exclaimed the English Prince; "we have come to visit you,

and to stay till to-morrow—if your engagements will allow. George,” he continued, with a smile at that Prince, “is more polite than I am: he thought he’d be off, because, I suppose, he imagined you have some business on hand. *Have* you any business waiting to be attended to?”

“It can wait,” answered Prince Hermann. “But,” he insisted, “you *were* sent for! And the Herr Cancellarius sent for you—went for you—this morning! Do not deny it: where is the use?”

The Cancellarius himself saved the princes the embarrassment of making answer.

“It is true, sir,” said he, boldly, but paling with the energy of so much boldness: “I this morning did drive all the long way to Balmoral Castle, and entreated the aid of Her Majesty the Queen to turn you from your mad intention of abjuring your royal rank and marrying a lady who is of no rank at all.”

“You make a great matter of state of my intention,” said Prince Hermann, frowning.

“Your Royal Highness,” pleaded the Cancellarius, passionately, “I pray you be not blind to the situation. It is, most truly and surely, a

great matter of state to us all. Consider, sir. Figure to yourself the complications, the trouble that will arise in all courts if you tear yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in common dirt of clay! Conceive, sir!—conceive!”—and the poor old courtier pathetically paddled with his fat white fingers on the white table-cloth—“conceive the trouble in our own Boeotia, if you put yourself aside and the line of succession is changed! There may be even a revolution!”

“Very well,” said Prince Hermann; “let it come. The people—the asses!—will then be able to kick up their heels as they please; and their Socialist leaders—asses again!—will have the chance of showing how they can make and keep an orderly state! Who is it who has said, ‘The people is a beast of muddy brain’? It is true. I do not like the people; I have no interest in the people; and I think that the less I have to do with the people the better!”

“My dear Hermann,” smiled the English Prince, “that is a very pretty diatribe—very pretty, indeed! Truly, you should be a politician, not a prince!”

“But, your Royal Highness,” urged the Can-

cellarius, still paddling on the cloth with his fat fingers, "your Royal House was, ages ago, placed in authority over the people of Boeotia."

"Fudge, Cancellarius," exclaimed Prince Hermann; "we put ourselves there! What is the use of pretending otherwise?"

"Fudge!—pretending!" exclaimed the Cancellarius, working his hands like little hinged valves of easement.

"My dear Hermann," smiled the English Prince, "you are really too young for the clever fellow that you are!—too serious!—too ingenious!—too rosy, if I may say so! I suppose that in any case you intend to go on living on this planet? You must, then, make friends with many kinds of fudge and pretence, if you mean to live in anything like peace and comfort: you must really. Besides, if you mean to continue to live in your own company, you must make up your mind to be hand in glove with a good deal of pretence."

"How so?"

"How so? Why, at this moment, are you not pretending to yourself that you could not possibly love any lady as you love Miss What's-

her-name?—that she has no equal in the wide world? Fudge! I will wager she has ten, a hundred, a thousand equals, and a good many superiors; and if you do not see that now, because you are blinded with your own pretence, your own fudge, you will in a little while—a month after marriage (if you do marry her), or a year, or perhaps two years, according to her engaging qualities. Then you will wonder what on earth you made such a fuss about, and why one woman did not do for you as well as another—a princess, for instance, since you happen to be a prince. Except in such little fal-lals as rank, and wealth, and that kind of thing which must count for so much in this mortal life, one woman is as good as another—and it is only for the fleeting moment that she is a great deal better. And no woman—I do not care who she is—no woman is worth the sacrifice of your place in the world.”

“That is true!” exclaimed the Cancellarius, with heart-felt conviction. “That is so!”

Prince Hermann said nothing. He was struck uncomfortably with the fact that the English Prince’s opinion—cynical and worldly

though it was—coincided to all intents with that of Colonel Herries-Hay, the young lady's own father, who was neither cynical nor worldly, but only sincere and experienced. Yet still he repudiated such teaching. Love!—divine love!—was not thus to be weighed up in a balance, estimated, and dismissed! Even friendship——!

“Would you call friendship a finer passion than love?” he demanded.

“Not in my experience,” answered the English Prince, with a smile.

“A man has often thought so much of a friend that he has died for him!”

“I dare say. But,” said the English Prince, with a smile, “that was probably an extraordinary and abnormal event in a friendship that had run on quite ordinary lines. Did you ever hear of a man sacrificing his rank, his fortune, his position in the world in order to keep house with a humble friend?”

“I think I have heard of some such thing,” answered Prince Hermann. “But you wouldn't do it?”

“I wouldn't.”

“And you wouldn't die for your friend?”

"Well, no, I don't think I would," said the English Prince. "But, then, I am my own best friend; that sets friendship working in a vicious circle: I could not die for myself without myself dying."

"That is so exactly," said Prince Hermann, in triumph. "You have answered; it is a vicious circle. And I do not think you know any more of love than you know of friendship."

"My dear Hermann," smiled the Prince, "your argument is not good. For while I have freely admitted that I do not know much about friendship, I must declare that I know a great deal—I am an authority—about love."

Again Prince Hermann looked perplexed and embarrassed. At last he declared, "I don't care. My mind is made up. I know what I want—and arguments are useless."

"Quite so," said the Prince. "Arguments are like birchings: only those know their value who have ceased to have any need for them."

A servant entered, and said that a gillie of Lord Strathconacher had brought the *skene-dhu* with which His Royal Highness had killed the stag in the morning, and he presented a package.

The package was undone (while Prince Hermann rapidly recited the story of the killing of the stag) and there was displayed a *skene-dhu* most gaudily adorned on the haft with precious stones.

"But this is not my *skene-dhu*!" exclaimed Prince Hermann.

"There is a note," said Prince George of Schwangau; "it might be well to read it."

The note was opened and read. It was from the hand of the American millionaire who owned the stag and the land on which it had been killed. He declared that both he and stag had been highly honoured by the intrusion of the *skene-dhu* of His Royal Highness, the heir of the kingdom of Boeotia, and that in memory of the auspicious occasion he had taken the liberty of retaining his Royal Highness' *skene-dhu*, and asking him to accept another in exchange.

"The impudent rascal!" exclaimed Prince Hermann. "I want my own *skene-dhu*!"

"How much was it worth?" asked Prince George.

"Not much," answered Prince Hermann; "perhaps a pound. But that's not the point."

"Or ten shillings," said the English Prince. "And this," he continued, looking at the precious stones on the new weapon, "is worth a fortune."

"To the devil with his fortune. I wish to have my own *skene-dhu*."

"Quite so," said the English Prince. "You have neither ear nor eye, my dear Hermann, for valuable arguments. Nothing will convince you that it is good to be a Royal Highness. This American is to most people a mean, vulgar curmudgeon—and he treats you like this! If you had been a private gentleman, he would have had a lawsuit with you! And now! You don't see the value of the argument!"

"He shall have his argument back!" exclaimed the angry Prince Hermann. "I wish to have my own *skene-dhu*!"

"Exactly!" said the English Prince.

At the same instant another servant entered and presented Prince Hermann with a letter on a salver, which when opened and glanced at caused a blush to mount his cheeks.

CHAPTER XXIII

MEG'S DECISION

THAT letter which was put into Prince Hermann's hand was signed "Margaret Herries-Hay"—to explain which, with the high-mantling blood on the Prince's cheek, a return to the Herries-Hay household is necessary.

When the Colonel and his daughter left the Prince at the parting of the ways, they jogged homeward in silence well-nigh complete; for Meg was preoccupied with all that had happened to her and her thoughts thereon, and her father was considerate enough of her feelings and her fatigue to push no inquiries then. So they reached home before the house was up, and Meg went to bed for a few hours. The Colonel himself would not—could not—sleep; for it is the futile habit of age that it must wake and watch and worry over a crisis of trouble and anxiety which youth can blissfully slumber through.

He tramped down to the river and had his usual morning swim in the ice-cold water; and then he returned home to encounter his wife and younger daughter, to recite to them Meg's adventure and his own, and to eat a morsel of breakfast; and after that he settled down to wait for the waking of Margaret, "to have it out with her." He was thus waiting when the Cancellarius and the German prince drove past unrecognised.

Anon he heard a bell ring, judged it was Meg's, and went in. His younger daughter had been waiting on one foot, and with a tea-tray prepared, for the sound of her sister's bell. She was pouring out the tea when her father entered the kitchen.

"Oh," said he, "is that for Meg? Were you going up to her?"

"Yes, father," answered Mamie, with a touch of disappointment in her voice.

"Very well," said he, "go along. But don't stay; and tell her I want to come and have a word or two with her."

Two or three minutes later he mounted to Meg's room, on the intimation of Mamie that

Meg was ready to receive him. He found his daughter reclining in a folding-chair, arrayed in a loose dressing-gown. He considered her closely, and thought he had never seen her look so fresh, so sweet, and so rosy: she reminded him of a beautiful and perfumed flower, from which the morning dew has just evaporated in the warmth of the sun. Also there was a something dreamy in her manner—something at the same time sad and glad—which provoked his suspicion, and made him disarrange the preconceived order of his interview with her.

“Pon my word, Meg!” he exclaimed, “you seem to be all the better for your adventures and fatigues!”

“I don’t feel any the worse, thank you, father,” she answered.

Their glances met, and parleyed with each other an instant.

“Humph!” said the Colonel, half in doubt and half in assent to something in his mind; while Meg said nothing, but let fall her eyes and blushed.

“I suppose, Meg,” said he, “you guess why I am in a hurry to have a word with you. Per-

haps you heard Prince Hermann say, as we parted from him, that he was coming here to-day in the company of the Cancellarius?"

"I did hear him say something of the sort," answered Meg, stroking the lace that flowed over her bosom.

"And I dare say you can guess what his errand is when he proposes coming in that formal way?"

The ideas and impressions in Meg's head spun round and round: it was as if her mind were falling into a swoon. She had a strange delicious feeling of being aware what her answer should be, but of knowing also that it was drifting away from her attention while she considered it; so that, even after a long pause as of consideration, she only declared weakly, "I don't think I am at all sure."

"Well, I'll tell you plainly, Meg," said her father, promptly. "Prince Hermann intends formally to ask your hand in marriage!"

"It is very early to talk of marriage, don't you think, father?" said she; and still her ideas, her memories, her impressions of the past week were whirling and mixing inexplicably.

"Early or late, Meg," said her father, briefly, "that's his intention. His formal errand is to me, of course; and I don't want to answer him without an understanding with you."

"I see," said she. She knew completely what her father would be at, but she could not help him out with it: her instinct was to leave it alone, and let the delicious impressions, ideas, and suggestions in her mind continue whirling and blending—like figures of smoke and vapour in a draught of air.

Then came to the Colonel a quick suspicion of the truth—that Meg, who was usually resolute and clear in purpose, was letting herself drift. Why?

"Meg, my dear," said he, "when we spoke of this together a day or two ago, and I asked you if you had anything to tell me, you said, 'Not at present.' Have you anything to tell me now, Meg?"

"I—I don't know," said Meg, weakly, clasping her hands in her lap and fixing her eyes on them.

Her father's alarm increased: decidedly she

was drifting, he could not guess how far she might already have drifted.

"Have you, after all, Meg," he asked, "let yourself become seriously involved?"

She glanced up quickly, and looked a question with her eyes.

"I mean," he said, "your feelings about him."

"Perhaps I have," she answered, looking down again; then she added, as if her statement had not contained enough of the truth, "I believe I have."

"That's a pity, Meg," said her father, in simple disappointment; "because I think nothing but vexation and disappointment—or disaster—can come of it."

She looked up again, as if prepared to debate the point; but her father astonished and overcame her with a flanking attack.

"I don't like it at all!" said he, leaning stiffly back in his chair. "I should have stopped it, but you remember, Meg, you said, '*Trust me—trust me.*' I *have* trusted you, and——!" He flung out his hands, and pursed his lips.

"Oh, daddy!" cried Meg, sitting up also

now and clasping her knees, "do you mean I have betrayed your trust? Oh, no, surely I haven't!—have I?"

"Well, Meg, I don't know what you would call it," said her father; "but I find myself and you now in an awkward situation, in which I had never thought I'd be, or you'd be either."

"If you think I ought, father," said she, summoning a great resolution, "I'll never see him or speak to him again!"

"Would that be very terrible to you?" he asked, anxiously.

She turned her thoughts in upon herself, she cast her eyes around, and she answered, "It would, father! There is no use saying it wouldn't!"

"Well, Meg," said her father, with a sad and worried face, "I'm very sorry for you—and for him, too. But we can't leave it at that; you mustn't drift any longer, Meg."

"Have I been drifting, father?"

"Have you not? Drifting may be pleasant; but you must come to a stand and a resolution, Meg. What do you propose to do?"

"He is prepared," said Meg—"he wants to

—give up his royal rank, everything, and become a private gentleman.”

“ Oh,” said her father, “ he has told you that too! Well, that shows how serious he is, and it makes the matter more difficult for us all. It is, of course, preposterous, impossible. We cannot accept such a sacrifice from anyone; can we? ”

“ I suppose it would be a very great sacrifice. Yes,” she exclaimed, rising from her chair, “ I know it would! It would be an enormous sacrifice! The only thing is, father, if he doesn't mind the sacrifice; and he really makes nothing of it.”

“ Ah,” said her father, “ but he will. He is young now: ten years, five years hence, he will look back and think what a fool he very nearly made of himself.”

Meg turned with sharp anxiety on her face. “ You think he would, father? ” she asked. “ *You* wouldn't make such a sacrifice then?—and you would think him a fool if he did? ”

“ I wouldn't make such a sacrifice for any woman! ” said her father, with unnecessary energy of repudiation. “ And I would think any

man who made such a sacrifice a fool—even if he made it for you!”

“Oh, father!” was all she said. She was downcast, sad, and humble. She absently traced figures on the window-pane, and after a long pause she said, “I suppose you’re right, father. But I think—I am sure—I would not mind any sacrifice of position for the—the person I cared for!”

“Fortunately, Meg,” said her father, “we cannot put that to the test: you are not at all likely to be called upon for any sacrifice, except of your feelings. And, I think, you must sacrifice them, Meg,” he continued, earnestly, rising and taking her hand. “Your feelings, my dear, or his future and his position in the world: one or the other must go; you see that, of course. But think; if you sacrifice your feelings you will recover and be yourself again in a few weeks; if you let him sacrifice his high position, his prospects, his duty to his father and his country, it will be for ever—you will not only sacrifice him, remember, but his and your children’s children after him, for untold generations. Now, my dearest girl, look clearly at the matter, and

be brave. Which sacrifice shall be made?—the little or the great?”

Meg stood quite still, and looked out upon the beautiful Highland prospect which was now unaccountably darkened. She was pale, and for a few moments silent. At length she spoke in a voice that was firm, but that seemed cold and remote.

“Very well, father,” she said; “I’ll not see him when he comes. You answer him for me.”

“That’s my own brave Meg!” exclaimed the Colonel. He sought to embrace her, but she astonished him by putting him by, and saying, “Please leave me alone now, father, for a little while.”

When he was gone, she threw herself on her bed and gave way to a storm of sobbing. When she came to herself a little she discovered she was saying, “Oh, how I hate him!—how I hate him!—for making me do it! How I hate him!” And then she added, understanding her own words for the first time, “How horrible to say I hate my own dear father! How wicked I must really be!”

She was saying that to herself, half aloud,

when she discovered her mother was bending over her.

"My dear Meg! my own child!" her mother softly murmured, "I understand! I understand! And I feel for you—most deeply!"

Then came another voice — Mamie's — from the door: "Please, mayn't I come in too?" She came in, taking silence for permission, and exclaimed, at sight of Meg's disordered and bewept condition, "Oh, Megsy, what's the matter? Has father been a brute?"

"Hush, my dear!" said her mother; "you mustn't say these things." Then, turning again to Meg, she said, "No need to explain, my love; I understand. But I must have a little word to say in this, as well as your father. Oh, no, my dear; don't be afraid. I won't counsel you to disobey him. But you must not be rude to the Prince. You have promised not to see him again, I know." (How did she know that?) "All the more reason why you should write him a line of farewell."

"Oh, may I do that?" asked Meg, sitting up.

"Why not?" said her mother. "And I promise it shall be put into his hand."

"Oh," cried the distracted Meg, "but what can I say?"

"Say, my dear—just say what you feel you would like to say."

In an instant a blotting-pad and paper were on Meg's knee, placed there by the anxious and indignant Mamie, and a pen in her hand. She wrote on the impulse, without turning her words over.

"DEAREST PRINCE,—I must write good-bye, because I have promised my father not to see you any more. Don't—don't think me ungrateful for your beautiful love and devotion. You are a lover in a hundred thousand; but I cannot accept your sacrifice of yourself. It is too much. I am not worth it.—Yours,

"MARGARET HERRIES-HAY."

"May I look at it?" asked her mother, and she read it thoughtfully while Meg addressed an envelope, and gently nodded to herself when she had read; for the little note satisfied her subtle

sense of what was becoming and necessary under the circumstances. "It will do," she said.

After sitting a little while longer with Meg, and soothing her with the gentle dew of her presence and her conversation, she withdrew with Meg's note in her pocket. She called Mamie out with her, and Mamie, with a glimpse of comprehension, went without demur.

"You want me to take that note up to Ardnashiel, mother?" said she, as soon as they were out of the room.

"No, my dear," said her mother, softly; "that would keep you out over lunch, and your father would ask questions. But you know all the sharp boys round about: find one and send him with it. I dare say"—and she fumbled for her purse—"he'll do it for sixpence."

"Oh," said her daughter, "anyone will do it for me without sixpence."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRINCE'S TRUMP CARD

"*Messieurs mes cousins*," said Prince Hermann, when he had read Meg's impulsive and desperate note, and folded it away, "I have done your arguments the honour of listening to them. I think that is enough for the present. We have the day before us, and you may have the opportunity of repeating them later. Meanwhile, will you do me the honour of coming with me to see for yourselves the excellent excuse I have for resisting your arguments?"

"See the lady, do you mean?" asked Prince George of Schwangau, with a bright spark of interest in his eye.

"Yes, George," said Prince Hermann; "to see the lady."

"That," said the Prince, the Queen's own son, "will be a most agreeable interlude. I only

hope the sight of so many of us will not alarm the lady."

"She is not easily alarmed," said Prince Hermann.

The Cancellarius was drumming thoughtfully on the table, wondering what this sudden invitation could mean.

"You will come also, will you not, Herr Cancellarius?" said Prince Hermann.

"Yes, yes," said the Cancellarius, with enforced cheerfulness and briskness; "certainly, your Royal Highness, I come also." He still wondered, but he saw no reason to think he could be in any way compromised, or taken advantage of, by visiting the lady; indeed, it was better that he should go, for then he would have the whole proceeding under his eye.

They were well on the way when they came upon the Count von Saxe legging it along in their direction. Prince Hermann ordered the coachman to stop.

"Taking a walk, Count?" observed the Prince, the Queen's son.

"He must be tired," said Prince Hermann,

before the Count could reply; "we will give him a lift. Jump up, Saxe."

The Count hesitated.

"Don't waste time," said Prince Hermann with a laugh; "I know you are going our way."

So the Count mounted to the seat beside the coachman, and they drove on; while the Cancellarius still wondered, and noted with uneasiness the bright eye and the alert manner of his Prince.

The Herries-Hay family were all sitting down to tea when the dog-cart drove up to the gate of the manse.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Herries-Hay, "who can they all be? I hope there are cups enough!"

"I had better go," exclaimed Meg, rising in a flutter, with a glance at her father, who was putting on his glasses.

"Not yet!" whispered her mother, with calm precision. "Not at once! They will see you run away! Besides, here they are at the door!"

The servant ushered in Prince Hermann, and

his two companion princes, the Herr Cancellarius, and the Count von Saxe; and the Herries-Hay family, who now recognised all the princes, rose in bewilderment.

"Ah, pray, madam," said Prince Hermann, stepping forward, "do not disarrange yourselves because we come so many. These are my friends, your own Prince, and Prince George of Schwangau." Then he suddenly stepped to the side of Meg; took her hand before she was aware, and said in a clear voice, turning to his friends, "Permit me to introduce to you all, Margaret Herries-Hay, my wife to be!"

There was a dead pause of astonishment and bewilderment, and then exclamations broke out.

"*Mein Gott in Himmel!*" cried the Cancellarius, throwing up his hands.

"You have us at a disadvantage, sir," said the Colonel.

"I know, Colonel," said Prince Hermann, turning to him with a flash of triumph, "how is your Scottish law. I have here declared your daughter my wife in the presence of witnesses, and therefore she is my wife!"

Meg stood pale and trembling, her hand

tightly clasped in the Prince's without her being quite aware of it. The Colonel recovered his wits the first of the bewildered and befooled company—at any rate he spoke the first.

“I have no doubt,” said he, “that the intention of your Royal Highness is noble, generous, and manly; but, sir, I cannot permit it to have way!”

The princes, who had been noting Margaret, now gave her father all their attention—while Mrs. Herries-Hay plainly said, below her breath, “Oh, fiddle-de-dee, John!”

“Whether your declaration, sir,” continued the Colonel, “be good and valid in law or not, I do not know; but, in any case, neither I nor my daughter can hold you bound by it.” The Prince turned his head, and glanced with inquiry at Meg. “On our conscience, sir, we cannot!” insisted the Colonel.

“What does Miss Herries-Hay say?” observed the Prince, the Queen's son. “Let us hear her.”

Meg started, aware of her position, drew her hand from Prince Hermann's, and looked about her. She blushed and paled; she looked down

and hesitated an instant, before she replied. Then her words came soft and clear:

“I think Prince Hermann’s declaration should be left alone; it should count for nothing—unless he continues determined it should be otherwise. If he comes back in three months, and claims me—I—I shall let him.”

.

On the Monday following, Prince Hermann returned to Boeotia in the company of the anxious and crestfallen Cancellarius. He had some furious scenes with his father, the illustrious King of Boeotia, and with other important personages of his family; but he stood his ground, and he still obstinately hummed through the royal palace of Boeotia, “I’d crowns resign to call her mine!”

Within the three months he was again in Scotland. He had dropped his royal rank, and was known as the Count von Angemar, and in that name he claimed Meg’s promise—and had the claim allowed. The Count von Angemar made an offer of his sword to fight the enemies of England, but up till now Her Majesty the Queen has not seen fit to accept the offer; and

so the Count and the Countess live quietly and somewhat obscurely in the Highlands. Whether the Count will regret his abjuration of power and ambition, of the greater world beyond the domestic and the prospect of a royal Crown, time alone will show.



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